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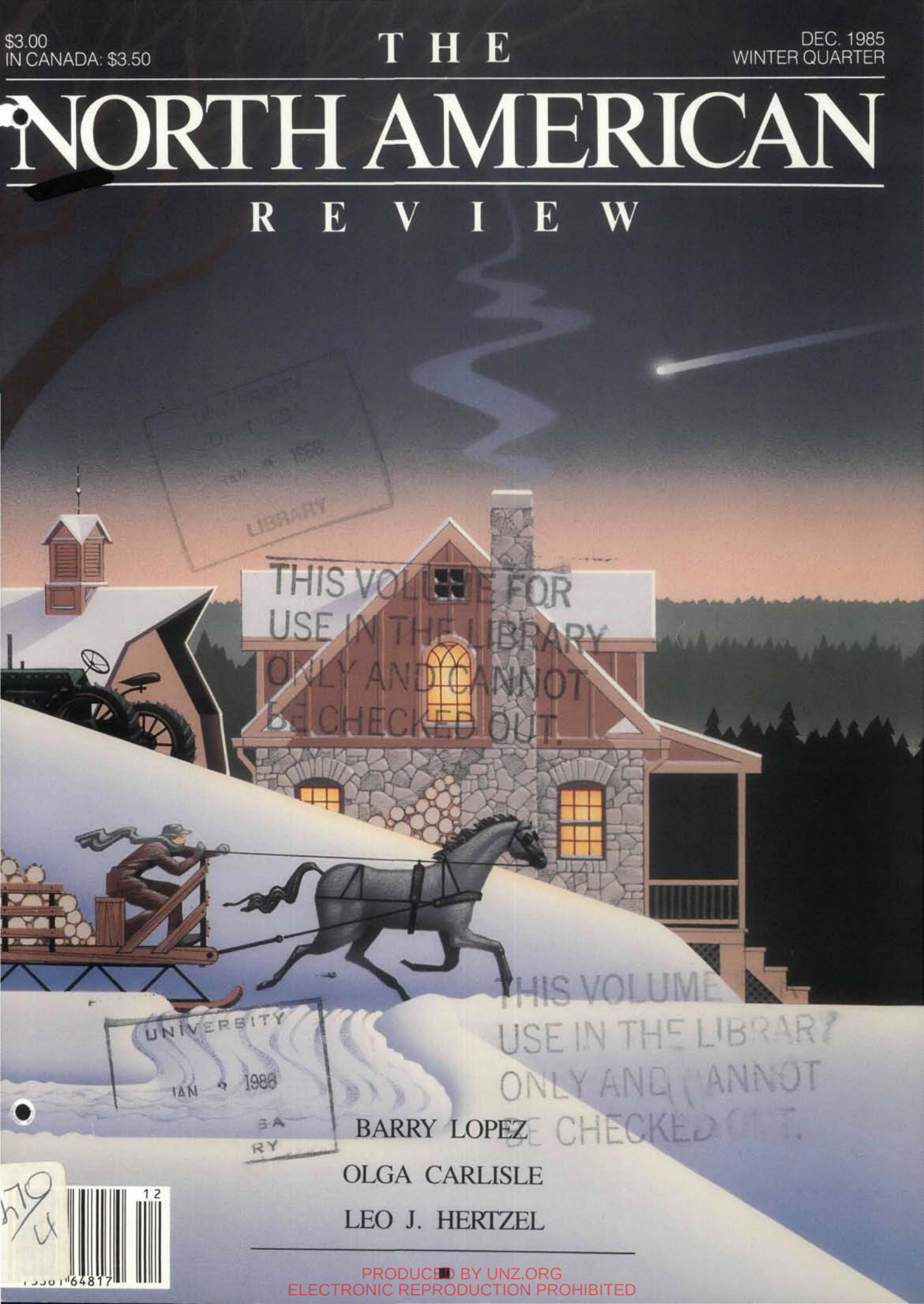

BARRY LOPEZ

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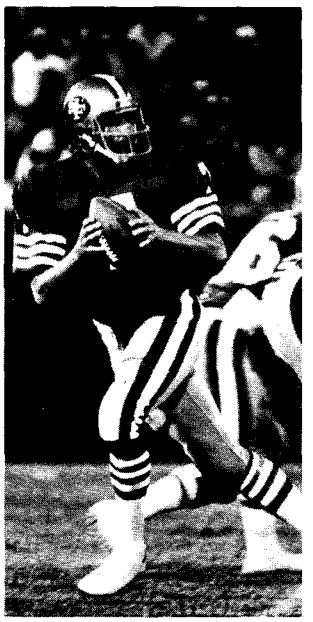

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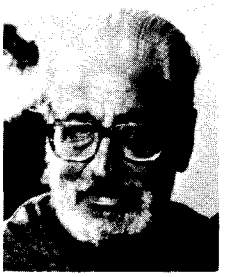

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The Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines announces the winners of **The 1985 General Electric Foundation Awards for Younger Writers:**

ANDREI CODRESCU for poetry published in **Smoke Signals.**

PETER COLE for poetry published in **Conjunctions.**

DAVID BROMWICH for a literary essay published in **Raritan.**

AMY HERRICK for fiction published in **The Kenyon Review.**

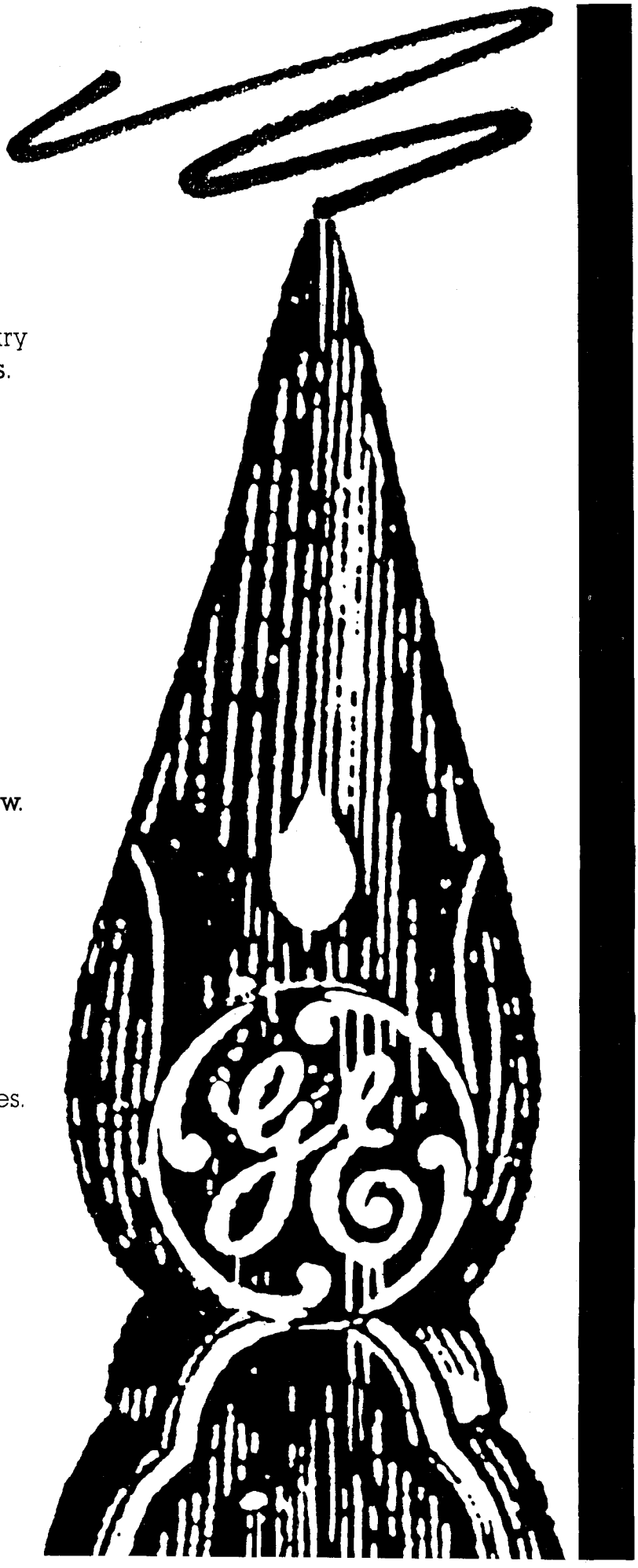
BETH NUGENT for fiction published in **The North American Review.**

WENDY STEVENS for fiction published in **Nimrod.**

The awards recognize excellence in new writers while honoring the significant contribution of America's literary magazines.

This year's judges were Michael Anania, Elizabeth Hardwick, Margo Jefferson and Kenneth Koch.

For information about The General Electric Foundation Awards for Younger Writers, contact: **CCLM, 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. (212) 481-5245.**



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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

On the evening of December 4th, it was our pleasure to accept a cash award of $1000 from the General Electric Foundation for having had the wisdom to publish a short story, "City of Boys," by Beth Nugent. That same evening, for writing that story, Ms. Nugent received a $5000 Award for Younger Writers from the GE Foundation, one of six authors so honored (see the advertisement on the preceding page). Both awards were administered by the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines.

You will recall that "City of Boys" was also included in this year's *Best American Short Stories* volume, published by Houghton Mifflin. Honors in the literary world are wonderful and often capricious, so we are wary of seeming to take credit for the good work of one of our authors. Nevertheless, we are proud, and nevertheless, we take the occasion to remind ourselves how fortunate we have been over the years in the many fine writers who have thought our pages a nice place to be seen in. Thank you, Beth Nugent. Thank you, young authors yet unread.

Is *The North American Review* old enough for a facelift? Possibly. In any case, we are pleased by the new logo that graces the NAR's front cover—it is spare, clean of line, and features (after seven years of the tail wagging the dog) the words NORTH AMERICAN, as of course it should, the world being rife with REVIEWs. With the March 1986 issue, Constant Readers will find further refinements of design, all of them (we trust) tasteful, none of them (we trust) merely trendy.

Looks aside, this number of the NAR contains an embarrassment of riches so great that the magazine may seem somewhat crammed. Barry Lopez's long, lyric chapter on the narwhal, the thorough overview by Richard Kostelanetz of American radio comedy*, the souvenir by Olga Carlisle (who was Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn's literary trustee from 1967 to 1974) of interviewing Pasternak, David Reich's gentle memoir of Nicaragua, David Hellerstein's brush with hurricane Gloria and Leo Hertzel's brush with Marxist theories of teaching English, Hollis Giammatteo's grueling march in the name of world peace—and fiction and poetry and reviews besides.

Other notes: Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams* (one of whose chapters begins on page 27) is a Main Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club in March. . . . Margaret Atwood's latest novel, *The Handmaid's Tale,* will be published in February by Houghton Mifflin and is a Featured Alternate Selection of the same club. . . . *Terra Infirma,* by Rodger Kamenetz, has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press; a portion of the book first appeared in the NAR.

Additional credits: The poem on page 12 by Jem Woolley is from *From Egypt Road to Cairo Street,* published by Your Own Stuff Press, 18 Waterloo Road, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 2BU, U.K.

*For dyed-in-the-wool radio buffs, a self-addressed, stamped, #10 envelope will bring you a bibliography we didn't have room for at the end of the Kostelanetz essay.

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THE NORTH AMERICAN
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EDITOR
Robley Wilson, Jr.

POETRY EDITOR
Peter Cooley

ART DIRECTOR
James Buckels

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Margaret Atwood
Roy R. Behrens
David Hellerstein
Leo J. Hertzel
Kenneth Lash
Barry Lopez
Stephen Minot
Mary Peterson
Scott Russell Sanders
Lawrence Sturhahn

BUSINESS MANAGER
Charlotte L. Wilson

EDITORIAL &
BUSINESS OFFICES:

University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

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Malone Almost Dies

KENNETH LASH

It isn't that I don't know where I am. I know where I am, all right.

Ralph didn't know where he was, or so he wrote.

And I'm not under the weather. There is no weather in a hospital.

I can make the *Times* last almost half the morning. The problem is, it's like sucking on a lollipop.

Let's see, what did Ralph say he had? First of all, he didn't know where he was. He was in that bed. He could see only a patch of window. Somebody came and shoved some food through the door. He had a cane or stick—I forget which—a few miscellaneous papers, a small pad and a small length of pencil, which he decided to use to write his autobiography. The problem being whether or not the length of the life and the length of the pencil would properly coincide.

Turns out it didn't matter.

This is an ugly room. Pink, and scaling, as if the walls had coldsores. I have a basket of spotted bananas, which I don't like; I like bananas green. I have a package of Lifesavers. Whether that's somebody's sense of humor, or my own, I don't know. I have all kinds of pens, I have all the pads I can ever ask for. I have waters and juices, and people keep bringing food in. I see them. They're anonymous. Like the food. The food—in order to know what I'm eating, I have to look at the menu. You can't tell by the taste. I have bandages and wires and tubes and look a little bit like one of those new robot toys that the kids are so nuts about. I have medicines, liquid and solid, x-rays every day, some kind of pump attached to the side of me, with a long, yellow hose. I have ten kinds of pills that I take every day.

Ralph was up in May's attic. That's right. That's where it turned out he was. Already starting his Assumption. Ascension. I have a telephone. I hear lots of sirens.

The nurse comes in with some powdered medicine I'm supposed to take. A very thin layer across the bottom of this little paper cup and it's clearly not enough, and I say, "It's supposed to be a rounded teaspoon." She says, "It's not round when you pour it into the cup." Another nurse comes in to take my temperature. Tells me she can't change Centigrade into Fahrenheit for me. I take the scale from her, and of course it's written right on there. There's a young doctor who comes by periodically to scare me. He's very polite. When he's through, he says, "Can I do anything else for you?"

I wonder what they did with his bowels.

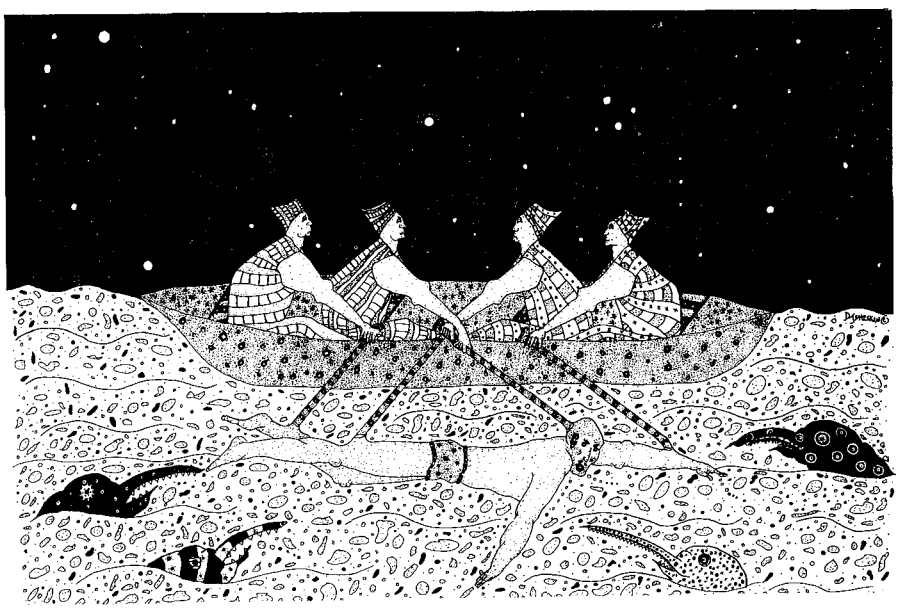
Grandma Etta used to ask if you'd had your movement. If you did, you got perhaps the strongest approval of which she was capable.

When I go to sleep, I put my hands straight down at my sides. Inevitably, when I wake up, there they are, tucked under my chin in that lily position. Where do hands get their ways, anyhow? One thing's certain. They don't ask for any advice.

It looks as if they're trying to tell me that I'm going to die, or that they're trying to take their part in my shoving off. Well, I hadn't thought about that really. I've been too busy being sick. I don't like the idea. When there's no faith left, all there is is fear. Ah, the poor dooby . . . went and converted himself from brick to stone, and now he's so close to sainthood that life is an afterthought. Or could it be a forethought?

Life is mostly smash and grab . . . which means that saints, whether they like it or not, are in some way anti-life. It's a by-product of the profession. It's like sitting around saying "yes and no," yes and no" to the question you think you're saying it to. Turns out you're wrong, that it's the action that matters. Right?

So he goes around trying to think of things to do for you, since he has no need of anything to be done for himself. And the result is the production of a miracle. You can explain it all days and all ways, and when it's done, the explanation lies there in the ground like the abandoned clothes of a passing scarecrow. Pass this way this day: one certified miracle of reasonable health and soundless mind. The poor dooby in his grand silencio. □



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KENNETH LASH

Ken Lash's first column for this magazine appeared in the spring of 1971; his last, dictated into a tape recorder, is on the page facing this one. Ken died of cancer, early in the morning of October 3rd, in Boston.

He was 67, and not planning on death. When we talked with him in August, he was looking forward to his release from New York Hospital, planning to sell his place on Cape Cod and move to southern California. When we talked in September, he was at Massachusetts General, apologizing for not having written his column.

Over fifteen years, those columns have dealt with large issues and small—economics, aesthetics, the need for heroes; the pleasures of being young, the nostalgia of cleaning out the attic. It will be too bad never again to have his words at the front of the NAR.

Ken wrote the poem on this page after his first hospital bout with the cancer, and sent it to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which published it. We reprint it here as a kind of summary—of a man curious about, and deeply interested in, the nature of his own mortality. The poem's sequel, which he cannot write, is that Ken's ashes are scattered in the ocean off Stonington, Maine, where he spent several summers and about which he once wrote: "There is that tie with lulling, with limitless, sleep. Gulls on the sky wall, the hard day done and gone. No more of the gratuitous, all now is regularity, an absolute. Beyond forgiveness and forgetting. It comforts without meaning to, so you're not obliged. You watch it, you listen. Snugged in."

TOPIC OF CANCER

Fifty-four years intact, then flung
in a blink into a hospital,
lying there answering questions
like a student with superior grades.
Even when they began to poke and prod
I knew they wouldn't find anything
beyond the little lump.
Day after day
they did the unforeseen to me,
rising finally to a crucifixion,
cuts along the tops of my feet,
different color dyes flowing
here and there inside me.
I kept answering all their questions
and felt unsick, padding down corridors. . . .

The second week I tired,
read papers and magazines without end.
People came with pathetic gifts.
I began to know the nurses and aides,
the night ones, who come when the halls
are still, with pills for sleeping,
with a feel for smoothing sheets.
"The bed isn't mussed," I said.
"I gotta do *somethin'* for ya, honey,"
she said.
The week wore on. A small operation
and suddenly a new doctor appeared,
then two others, talking,
talk feathery and careful
of chemotherapy, of radiation,
talk as soft
as the beginning of a business deal.
You're going to do fine.
When they left
I lay back and wondered
what I'd do finer if I did fine.
Stop trying to save money?

The third week brought a trip,
a long one, down, and down again
to a sudden place of low ceilings
wall to wall with men, women, children
here in steerage, every color
of gray skin. All and each
in a dark blue hospital gown,
all of them, of us,
in dark blue gowns, awaiting
the necessary miracle. So-and-so
Curing the Ill.
So-and-So
was in the low heavy rooms beyond,
a massive machine
hanging from tracks on the ceiling,
prepared to shoot a force you can't see
or feel, right through your skin
into you.
The machine comes down, pointing.
It's the century after tomorrow
and it feels like the Dark Ages. . . .

Out-patient now.
The treatments go on.
You go on, slogging back and forth
between Science and the grocery store.
Along the way your hair falls out,
to help you give over vanity, I suppose,
though the purpose may be more mystic.
Still no feeling in the fingertips
as I sort through papers at the office.
Make no mistake: I will go on,
like you, sorting papers.
It isn't known yet
what kind of body
I am to have and to hold.
First thing is,
I want my hair back.
Then maybe a greenhouse. . . .

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Teaching the Queen's English

LEO J. HERTZEL

I went up to the University of London one day last winter to visit a faculty friend. In a tall building behind the British Museum, looking out on the late afternoon darkness, we talked shop—about Jamaican kids in London schools, about dialects and the way a man's dialect affects his chances of getting a job, about the National Association for the Teaching of English conference coming up in April in Nottingham, about how money for research into the teaching of writing has dried up in England the past few years.

"All the research money is in America now." He shook his head. "The money's dried up here. It's the government, that Thatcher government."

"Well, we have problems too," I said. "It's probably not the government's fault, but in the States teachers get a lot of pressure to teach the basics, old-fashioned grammar, even diagramming. At least your English teachers still turn out Literary Gentlemen, teach D.H. Lawrence, read Leavis."

He got up and began putting on his coat. "I suppose there are still some Leavisites around, maybe in the countryside," he said wearily. "But before we talk any more about that, I think you'd better read Terry Eagleton. Have a look at his *Literary Theory*, won't you? A lot of our teachers read that book. I'm surprised you haven't."

It was good to hear there were still Leavisites around, even if they were in the countryside. Fellow of Downing College at Cambridge, editor, critic, teacher, F.R. Leavis was important, solid, a man who knew values. He believed modern industrial society is relentlessly destroying standards of quality, human values. In the first issue of *Scrutiny*, he wrote, "The general dissolution of standards is commonplace. Many profess to believe . . . that the end of Western civilization is in sight." He believed that D.H. Lawrence had a saving vision into the sustaining wholeness of life before the chaos of the industrialized modern world.

English teachers, Leavis said, are about the only people left to pass on the life-affirming values of the Great Tradition. He convinced many of them that their work was the most important thing a person could do in these corrupt times. Leavis's detractors mocked him as the man who would save civilization through literary criticism, but British English teachers loved him.

I went to Foyles bookstore and bought a copy of Eagleton's *Literary Theory*. I took the book back to my rooms and read it twice. I made some notes: English teaching (Leavis type) just busy work . . . "There is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable *in itself* . . . drop once and for all the illusion that the category 'literature' is 'objective.'" . . . teach working class writing . . . eliminate English departments . . . forget Great Tradition . . . Great Tradition supports capitalist class system . . .

Literary Theory is more than an attack on Leavis. It is an overview of literary theory of the past hundred years or so with informed discussions of structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and reception theory. "Any method or theory which will contribute to the strategic goal of human emancipation, the production of 'better people' through the socialist transformation of society, is acceptable," writes Eagleton. He makes English teachers of the Leavis persuasion look foolish. Dupes of the social order they want to preserve, he argues, they do nothing to improve the lives of the world's hungry and its poor.

I went to the library at the University and looked for responses to Eagleton. ". . . doyen of the younger generation of Marxist literary critics in this country," wrote David Lodge in a London *Sunday Times*. "Of course he exaggerates, like all evangelists . . ." wrote Oxford's John Bayley in *TLS*.

In April I boarded the Inter-City train to Nottingham at London's old Saint Pancras station. I was going to the NATE conference at the university in Nottingham, a conference that would bring together English teachers from all over the United Kingdom to talk about their work. I took along my copy of Leavis's *The Living Principle*.

The train rolled north through factory yards, past steel sheds and warehouses and churches of the manufacturing towns, past sheep in green fields. I read Leavis quoting one of his favorite passages from Lawrence, the death of the intuitive faculty, "characteristically Laurentian," Leavis said.

> The car ploughed uphill through the long squalid straggle of Tevershall, the blackened brick dwellings, the black slate roofs glistening their sharp edges, the mud black with coal-dust, the pavements wet and black. It was as if dismalness had soaked through and through everything. The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling. The stacks of soap in the grocer's shops, the rhubarb and lemons in the greengrocers! the awful hats in the milliners! all went by ugly, ugly, ugly, followed by the plaster and gilt horror of the cinema with its wet picture announcements, "A Woman's Love," and the new big Primitive chapel, primitive enough in its stark brick and big panes of greenish and raspberry glass in the windows. The Wesleyan chapel, higher up, was of blackened brick and stood behind iron railings and blackened shrubs. The Congregational chapel, which thought itself superior, was built of rusticated sandstone and had a steeple, but not a very high one. Just beyond were the new school buildings, expensive pink brick, and gravelled play-ground inside iron railings, all very imposing, and mixing the suggestion of a chapel and a prison. Standard Five girls were

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having a singing lesson, just finishing the la-me-doh-la exercises and beginning a "sweet children's song." Anything more unlike song, spontaneous song, would be impossible to imagine: a strange bawling yell followed the outlines of a tune. It was not like savages: savages have subtle rhythms. It was not like animals: animals *mean* something when they yell. It was like nothing on earth, and it was called singing.

Connie sat and listened with her heart in her boots, as Field was filling petrol. What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will-power remained.

In the seat ahead of me two black children, matching red and white wool caps pulled tight over their foreheads, climbed on the seat to stare over its back at me. The railroad conductor, a young man wearing an ill-fitting uniform jacket, checked their tickets, frowned, walked to the rear of the car, returned to check them a second time. He went back down the aisle, and they jumped up to lean over their seat again to stare at me reading.

"The whole great form of our era will have to go," Leavis quoted Lawrence. "And nothing will really send it down but the new shoots of life springing up and slowly bursting the foundations. . . ."

The train sped past clusters of nuclear cooling towers squatting on the green land.

Nottingham this spring was drab, gray, lifeless after the turbulence of London. Business hasn't improved much since the miners went back to work, the Indian cab driver told me. I thought it might get better, it's been very bad here for a long time, he said.

The air was cold with a constant chill wind, but the campus was already preparing for summer. Formal gardens near the library were clipped and raked clean. Here and there patches of brilliant yellow daffodils leaned away from the gusts of rain.

I sat at the desk in my unheated room in Hugh Stewart Hall and looked over the conference program. Nottingham seemed a proper spot for English teachers to gather and talk about their profession. Leavis would have approved, I am certain. Lawrence himself used Nottingham and the land around as setting for some of the novels. Ursula in *The Rainbow* taught in the city, and then later, while a student at the university, learned to despise education as just another salable commodity in a commercial world. The library at the university now holds a large collection of Lawrence papers: letters, manuscripts, photographs. This year it will arrange special exhibits and workshops in observation of the one-hundredth anniversary of Lawrence's birth.

The NATE conference was organized around a series of fourteen commissions. With titles like "New Ways of Reading Old Texts" and "Women and Writing," each commission would be a six-session workshop focusing on a particular theme or topic. I was assigned to Commission 13, "The Ties that Bind—A Critical Look at English Teaching Over the Last Hundred Years." As nearly as I could determine from the program, 13 would briefly scan traditional principles or patterns of English teaching and then go on to explore what English might be in the future. The topic was broad enough to cover just about anything.

Commission 13 met in a ground floor classroom with windows on one side that looked out on a long lawn. Nearly thirty teachers were assigned to 13. Four or five were, like me, American visitors. With only a few exceptions, the teachers were young. There were more men than women. Their dress was casual, sometimes even shabby, with khaki jackets, flannel shirts, baggy fatigue pants, loose jeans, tennis shoes, combat boots. Only a few members attended wearing jackets and ties. They all brought notebooks and pens clipped in pockets. They were quietly at ease with one another and seemed not to have need for much polite chatter. We found chairs around tables pushed together to form a large hollow square, so crowded there was scarcely elbow room in front of us.

Commission 13 had five leaders, young, male, classroom teachers in secondary schools: Roy Goddard, Mike Hamlyn, David Jackson, David Light, and Malcolm Stanton. From the beginning, I found it difficult to maintain separate identities for these men. Though they sat apart from one another, they blended in a comfortable, what seemed to me nearly interchangeable, partnership; word men, talking easily on their feet, soft accents, pausing confidently to think for answers and not minding the silences, passing discussion topics easily back and forth, nodding to one another to transfer the lead like musicians in a chamber music group, carefully respectful of each other and of the rest of the members of the commission. They cared about teaching English and they assumed we did too.

We passed around thick packets of discussion papers. Waiting for the first meeting to begin, I looked at a nine-page, single-spaced document titled "Beyond the Literary Heritage." Written by one of the leaders, it attacked the required literature texts in secondary school English courses, but it went beyond this immediate target to the familiar figure of F.R. Leavis in the background.

Overwhelmingly drawn from a canon that was, by and large, established by T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis and his associates and followers, they reflect as a whole a view of history, society and what is valuable that was fiercely argued by Leavis and his acolytes throughout the second quarter of this century. . . . The point is that although the Scrutineers were extraordinarily successful in establishing their version of English studies in universities, colleges of education, and grammar schools, they failed in their cultural enterprise of establishing a role for themselves as an intellectual elite who would cleanse the language and culture of the tribe in defence of high cultural values and in opposition to the barbarities of modern industrial society. In the end the literary canon, the tradition it embodied and the view of culture and civilization whose instrument it was, were no match for the political realities of that phase of the twentieth century. To put matters crudely, how then are the texts of this canon, the kind of literary criticism that maintains it and the superannuated ideology which . . . texts and criticism purvey, going to do a job for our students today? What had meaning and vital point for an Eliot or Leavis hankering after a golden past of organic social unity is unlikely to have an equivalent urgency, to offer similar

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possibilities for meaning to our 16-19 year olds.

That social and political realities of our time have destroyed traditional cultural values was this document's message. The literary tradition holds little meaning amid the roaring chaos of the late twentieth century world. It was a theme to be expressed again and again in Nottingham during the next few days.

Prominent on the first page of the packet of discussion papers were a group of quotations clearly chosen by our leaders as trigger material to ignite our responses:

> England is sick and English literature must save it. The Churches having failed and social remedies being slow, English literature now has a triple function; still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the state.
>
> George Gordon, Professor of English at Oxford c.1914

> We are reaping what was sown in the sixties. The fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and self-restraint were denigrated . . . Children need, respond to, and often lack clear rules. Only in this way will they grow up in a framework of certainty and learn the self-control necessary to cope with the problems of life.
>
> Mrs. Thatcher, 27 March 1982

> Black youths in South London are always complaining of harrassment in that they are stopped and questioned by the police. This grievance would disappear if they all learned to do what some have done—to answer in 'respectable' standard English rather than in the tones of Cockney or synthetic second-generation Caribbean.
>
> John Honey, Professor Leicester Polytechnic

Around the table, commission members laughed good naturedly at what they perceived as George Gordon's innocence in expecting literature to cure the sickness of the state. But the quotations from Mrs. Thatcher and Professor Honey angered them. Mrs. Thatcher's mention of a "framework of certainty" was particularly disturbing, some members relating that phrase to the intellectual rigidity they saw as characteristic of her conservative government. They talked, their remarks often going beyond the subject of the quotations to include larger issues the speakers felt were hidden behind:

"It may well be that Mrs. Thatcher's quest for certainty is a search contrary to the very purpose of language."

"All this talk about pronunciation and respectable dialect, it's just another government move to force English teachers to support the class system."

"Respectable standard English tones indeed, the man does not know the first thing about language."

"Thatcher's lust for certainty again, ignorance, pure ignorance . . ."

"We are facing a crisis with this government forcing these absurd ideas on English teachers."

The leaders drew this meeting to a focus. We would examine a document titled ENGLISH STUDIES 1882-1985: A GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE. It was a one-page chart or blueprint briefly listing characteristics of the three major patterns in English teaching during the past hundred years. The leaders asked us to look at each of these patterns and see how much value it had in the present world.

PATTERN I: English as a language for life.
Teachers concentrate on basic skills, standard English, respectable dialect.

Commission members had very few good things to say about PATTERN I. In the first place, most of them rejected the idea that one dialect is superior to others or that everyone should be taught to use standard English. Further, they did not view the proper role of English teachers as men and women teaching basic skills. All of these wrong-headed ideas, they argued, were being encouraged by the conservative Thatcher government in order to advance regressive social and political policies—strengthening of the class system, for example, or developing a docile labor force. "The great threat of this conservative government is this utilitarian emphasis in English," said a young woman, "teaching students to talk properly, fill out forms, expecting us to be disciplinarians, they'd like nothing better than having us do that." When another member, a distinguished older man who identified himself as a retired university professor, observed about the teaching of basic skills, "We really ought to be doing some of this kind of work," no one objected. But Commission 13 would not accept PATTERN I as a description of the proper work of English teachers in the present world. There are more important things to do, they said.

PATTERN II: English in the Great Tradition.
Teachers concentrate on literature, the classical heritage.
F.R. Leavis

Even though some members spoke of Leavis with fondness and respect, the commission would no more support PATTERN II than it would PATTERN I. They said the Great Tradition is tainted with aristocratic snobbery, the élitism inherent in a class-structured society. They talked about coal miners and women's rights and unemployment. The classical heritage fails in the face of the poverty and suffering of the modern world, they said. English teachers, most members of the commission seemed to agree, must do something more than teach classics while the helpless of the world suffer at the hands of the rich and the powerful. But the commission did not want to abandon the teaching of literature altogether. What it wanted was to change the meaning of literature to emphasize a broad range of popular culture. "It seems to me that we teachers are failing to equip our students to meet the disturbing needs and challenges of contemporary society, that we're failing to address ourselves to large and significant areas of cultural and discursive experience that we ought to see as our province," commission leader Roy Goddard wrote. "In all conscience, how can we ignore the media—television above all—popular consumer culture or the languages of politics and authority, how banish from consideration the worlds of work, unemployment, the local community and

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all the social institutions and forces that our students will encounter and have to deal with—struggle with—when they leave school?" ("What we have to get essential recognition for is that major creative writers are concerned with a necessary kind of thought," Leavis wrote in 1975. "To such recognition the climate of our age is hostile, the hostility being a measure of the importance that is denied.")

PATTERN III: English in the progressive mode. Teachers concentrate on student self-expression, creative activities.

"I think we can all agree that this approach to English teaching failed totally in the seventies," said a leader. There was no disagreement.

Having rejected the English teacher role as basic skills instructor, as preserver of the cultural heritage, as developer of the student's creative self; having agreed that literature should be broadened to emphasize popular consumer culture, the commission was faced with the question of what should English teachers be doing in their classes. What is English really all about?

The phrase "active cultural enquiry" was used in one or two of the commission discussion papers. Someone suggested English as active cultural enquiry was an attractive thought, but the discussion this day went no further than that.

"I had no idea these people were so political," an American from a southern university said to me after the meeting. "I think they want to replace a conservative government with a Communist government."

Terry Eagleton delivered the opening address to the full conference that evening. His speech was titled "The Bankruptcy of Liberal Human Values in Literary Studies."

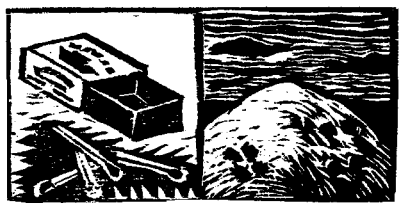
Looking a bit like John Denver, looking loose and comfortable in baggy trousers and open jacket, thick glasses, smoking a cigarette, Eagleton stepped before a full crowd in a tiered science classroom. Wine fumes from the party Eagleton's publishers gave in the annex drifted on the layered smoke in the stale air.

Eagleton spoke from notes in a very soft voice. He began by talking about what he called "moral technology," a term meaning "a particular set of techniques and practices for the instilling of specific kinds of value, discipline, behaviour and response in human subjects." He went on to talk about literature as a particular form of moral technology.

> It teaches us . . . to be—let me rehearse some of the cherished terms—sensitive, imaginative, responsive, sympathetic, creative, perceptive, reflective. Notice the resounding intransitivity of all of these familiar shibboleths. The task of the moral technology of Literature is to produce an historically peculiar form of human subject who is sensitive, receptive, imaginative and so on . . . *about nothing in particular*. This notion would have been utterly unintelligible to Aristotle, St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas and Samuel Johnson. . . .
>
> The political gains of this for the given social order are considerable. For what this means, in effect, is that subjectivity is radically depoliticised, and that is always to the advantage of the ruling order. . . . a form of subjectivity which is, apparently, an end in itself, which works, apparently, all by itself, and which is its own justification. This is what is meant by saying that in liberal capitalist society we are now "free" . . . This form of subjectivity is the space of our freedom and creativity—which is to say, the place where we are bound most firmly to the capitalist social order. . . .
>
> "Experience" in itself is blind and will teach you nothing: it's only by the political *interpretation* of experience that existence becomes fruitful. . . .

The words "action and conflict" were important in the final passages of Eagleton's speech as he developed the idea that all good liberal humanists desire a transformed society. Transformation requires political action, he argued, political action requires struggle.

The speech was an extension of some of the ideas developed in *Literary Theory*. The audience liked Eagleton and the things he had to say. Their applause was enthusiastic but not boisterous. They asked him



respectful and supportive questions: How can I bring your approach to English into my classroom when I'm being pressured to teach vocational things?

The next morning Commission 13 began to look at options for the future. What should English teaching become? "The purpose of our meeting today," said a leader, "is to disturb long-standing assumptions."

We examined "Accidents Will Happen: It was just a borrowed bike, but to Petra it was her passport to love," a photo-narrative laid out in frames like a comic strip, four full pages, published in *My Guy*, a magazine for girls between the ages of eleven and thirteen or fourteen.

The narrative is Petra's love story, beginning, "It all started when I popped down to the shops . . .," with a photograph showing a very young Petra on her boyfriend's bicycle. Then the bicycle is smashed and Petra loses the overbearing boyfriend. A second smashed bicycle leads her to a new and gentler boyfriend, Bill. The final photograph shows Petra with her arms firmly around Bill after he has said to her, "THE ONLY THING I WANT IS FOR YOU TO SHUT UP WHILE I KISS YOU . . ." Petra says to the reader, "And that's exactly what I did!"

The story is straightforward comic strip narrative with no troublesome intellectual content. The three main characters—Petra, Tom, Bill—are nearly indistinguishable, unisex people. They all wear pants, earrings, modified punk hair styles.

It is difficult to imagine what F.R. Leavis would have made of the scene: thirty serious English teachers studying Petra's story, exchanging suggestions about ways to use it in their classrooms. (". . . the 'mass media' representing our cretinized and cretinizing civilization are working destructively with a success that . . .," wrote Leavis a number of years ago.) The teachers understood the limitations of Petra's story, but they also agreed that this was the kind of thing their students actually bought and read, an important form of popular culture. They talked.

". . . I don't think we should ask *why* anybody wants to buy this stuff in the first place . . . I don't go into the classroom and say, 'Look at this absolutely worthless piece of rubbish you enjoy.' . . . *My Guy* has a series of

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radio advertisements telling the kids its articles are 'true to life.' Would you say this Petra story is true to life? . . . Still, in England, to be educated is to be educated to a literary consciousness, but this story, well . . . I have trouble talking about this kind of thing in my class. I can't get over the feeling that I'm rubbishing what the kids like. How do you get over that? . . . This story illustrates the importance of visual images in modern life . . . a fairy tale in modern dress . . . I don't understand any of this. These characters are cardboard figures, not even a sex distinction. The whole thing seems so terribly wrong-footed about the realities of the human condition . . ."

Feeling good about using the Petra story and others like it in their classes, many of the teachers saw such use as the beginning from which, hopefully, they could move their students to something a bit more challenging, though what that something might be was never clarified.

We proceeded to *English from 5 to 16*. In October of 1984, the Department of Education and Science of the offices of Her Majesty's Inspectors distributed to English teachers and other interested citizens a twenty-four page booklet titled *English from 5 to 16*. While not an official directive, the booklet was widely perceived as a statement of intentions of the Conservative government regarding the teaching of English. "It is hoped, however, that it [the booklet] will at least provide a framework for general agreement about the the aims, objectives and general principles of English teaching—or an incitement to others to provide a better framework," said the booklet's Conclusion. "For present practice in the teaching of English in our schools varies greatly, and such agreement is urgently needed."

The aims, objectives, and principles of English teaching given in *English from 5 to 16* stress basic skills and fundamentals of reading and writing more than the cultivation of sensitive literary minds. The booklet also places some importance on socially appropriate forms of discourse. "Punctuation needs more attention in English teaching than it sometimes receives, . . ." reads *English from 5 to 16*. ". . . What is necessary is that the pupils should learn to speak clearly and intelligibly; and if their accent is difficult for those outside their speech community to understand, they should be able to modify it when necessary. . . . The ability to read responsively and critically should be fostered by group attention to a range of reading matter. This should include fiction, poetry and plays; but it should also include reading for information and for the understanding of public affairs."

English from 5 to 16 received a good deal of public support when it was first distributed. It was praised in newspaper editorials as a thoughtful and realistic statement.

Because the booklet attempts to chart directions for future English teaching practice, it came within the broad field of Commission 13's concern. Commission members did not view the booklet as a discussion document to excite talk about the proper role of English. They saw it as an immediate threat, as first step in the Conservative government's plan to control thought in their classrooms. "We intend to challenge the paper's passive, inert view of language and culture and will offer for consideration examples of alternative classroom practice that confront the ideologically structured nature of language and attempt to utilise that potential to begin the work of rebuilding English as active cultural enquiry," was the way one leader stated the purpose of the discussion.

They talked about *5 to 16*: . . . a document of social control . . . I believe we'll be forced to accept this plan. We all know we live under a régime that will not accept no . . . as for the newspapers, their promotion of this document, I say we must refuse the readings of the dominant ideology.

During a short recess, a woman member in baggy green pants and a loose jersey, looking physically very strong, smiling broadly, handed me a copy of *Teaching London Kids*, a magazine with a photograph of three defiant looking adolescent girls on the cover. The woman was selling the magazines. I gave her the required sixty pence. In addition to a vigorous attack on *English from 5 to 16* by the University of London's Harold Rosen, *Teaching London Kids* contained a page 1 editorial titled "GAME FOR A JOB!" The editorial warns that in some London schools the headmasters are beginning to enforce dress codes for students. Next term there would be a dress code for the staff, it said. "It's a sign of the times: the confidence of authority to be authoritarian; the certainty of hierarchy in laying down its own definitions regardless of grassroots feeling."

At lunch I sat beside the wife of an American professor assigned to Commission 13. "My husband is shocked at the things being said in that group," she told me. "He says he isn't going to attend any more of their meetings."

"I'm surprised at the bitterness, too," I said. "I keep wondering if all English teachers in Britain are this politicized. Do they all hate the government this much? Maybe 13 is a little unusual."

"You're not getting the whole picture," a man across the table said to us. He was bearded. He was smiling broadly. He had been listening to our conversation. "It's the dissatisfied ones who get heard. They talk a lot and write articles. But there are lots of teachers who go about their business, teach their Shakespeare . . ."

"Do they read Terry Eagleton?" I broke into his sentence.

"They haven't even heard of Terry Eagleton, especially the teachers in the country. You'll find the majority of our teachers aren't like the ones you're meeting. Most of them don't even come to conferences like this one. They stay at home and do their work. I think they'd be even more shocked than your husband is to hear this kind of talk." He looked at the professor's wife.

I asked him what conservative teachers said about Eagleton's ideas.

"Eagleton's better sociology than literature," he said very slowly, making the sentence sound as if it had hidden depth. "Look, if you want to know what some of us think about all of these extreme ideas, come up to my office this afternoon and I'll give you some things to look at. I teach here at the university."

The professor's wife left, and the man and I sat and talked. He told me there were 326 English teachers registered for the conference, that nearly one-fifth of them were American visitors, that he was very happy to see so many Americans here because they brought fresh ideas, new perspectives. He explained that he was much interested in the conference because he was in English Education. He helped prepare students to become English teachers.

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He and I shook hands warmly.

Later that day I went over to his office. He wasn't in at the time, but he had left me a small book, *Developments in English Teaching* by Michael Saunders. Inside the cover he had written a pleasant conference greeting. I took the book back to Hugh Stewart Hall. Outside the rain continued to fall and the wind blew in chill gusts. There still was no heat in the room. I got into bed and read Saunders' book through. It said thoughtful things about basic skills instruction, about traditional liberal humanism, about progressive child-centered education. It acknowledged the importance of F.R. Leavis, "His name is a household word, and is called upon whenever a tradition of standards and scholarships is up for discussion." But I could find no discussion of English as "active cultural enquiry," no treatment of ideas like English as social concern, ideas that Eagleton was making so attractive to these teachers.

Commission 13 continued looking at English in the future, turning to audio/visual possibilities.

> Attention to the rules of grammar and care in the choice of words encourages punctiliousness in other matters. This is not just an intellectual conceit. The overthrow of grammar coincided with the acceptance of the equivalent of creative writing in social behaviour. As nice points of grammar were mockingly dismissed as pedantic and irrelevant, so was punctiliousness in such matters as honesty, responsibility, property, gratitude, apology, and so on.
>
> *The Observer*
> 7 Feb. 1982

An overhead projector put this quotation on a screen set up beside a television receiver at one end of our room. Having already rejected at least twice the importance of grammar in English teaching of the future, 13 members quietly accepted the quotation as just another example of the fatuousness of the conservative foe. One member quietly mentioned that the pompous stance of a speaker who would use the word "punctiliousness" twice in one short statement was evidence of the quality of mind that held such beliefs. The man sitting next to me turned toward me and said he recognized the quotation on the screen. "That statement was

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made by the Headmaster of Westminister School," he said softly, as if he were sharing with me a secret of great consequence.

Commission leader David Light stood beside the television set and explained that we would now go through an exercise he and another Sheffield teacher had successfully used in their sixth-form classes last November. The exercise was an examination of media treatment of the coal miner strike, with a focus on the BBC television news coverage of November 11. On that night news cameras filmed a miners-police confrontation at the colliery in Cortonwood, a small town in South Yorkshire. BBC television carried a ninety-second sequence of various scenes at the colliery.

The classroom exercise had begun with a discussion and some research but because of the shortage of time we in the commission would go directly to the heart of the project, which was to view the ninety seconds of the November 11 news film *without the sound*. Then each of us would write a commentary or voiceover for the film we had seen. Our commentary could be a) pro police, or b) pro miners, or c) neutral. Students in the Sheffield classrooms had been given the same directions.

Light showed the film several times. The scenes had been photographed at night, and the film was a severely edited sequence with quick scenes of a broken window in a store, lines of policemen marching down a road, an earnest-looking policeman holding a bottle with a wick in it, an earnest-looking policeman talking at the camera, a view of the mine head.

We were given five minutes to write. I decided to try a neutral voiceover and produced the following narrative: *It is difficult to get a clear picture of what really went on in Yorkshire last night. Squads of riot police, some with dogs, faced groups of miners in the streets. Using some force, police arrested at least one man. Police exhibited one homemade petrol bomb allegedly discovered in a miner's possession. Police also showed newspeople a broken window in a police station and one in an appliance store and a handful of iron bolts which police suggest prove the level of violence of the Cortonwood miners.*

The more I struggled with this narrative the more I realized it was nearly impossible for me to write a neutral voiceover because the film had already been edited by news people, and the editors had edited it (or else the photographers had shot it) from the point of view of the police. All of my sentences began with "police" because they were the ones doing the action, and they were doing it in a restrained and orderly fashion. It was nearly impossible to be neutral and still write English if all references to the miners had to be in the passive voice.

Perhaps that was the underlying idea of the exercise, that students learn how film can be used to manipulate public opinion. But when it came time to have some commission members read aloud their voiceovers, most, if not all, of them were narratives supportive of the strikers. I thought some showed fine imagination. (For the scene showing employees inside an appliance store sweeping up broken glass from a shattered window, one woman wrote something like, "friendly miners left picket lines to help store employees clean up the mess after police squads broke a huge plate glass window. . . .") The ensuing discussion was inconclusive and 13 went on to another project: the use of film to record local history.

The next morning, breakfast in the dining hall next to Hugh Stewart was eggs ranchero without the hot chili sauce. I sat and read the final issue of the Conference News Letter which contained summary reports from all of the commissions.

> This week Commission 13 has been concerned to confront the political conditions in which state schooling now operates and to explore the political, social and cultural assumptions which are deeply embedded in English itself . . .
>
> Any reconstruction of English Studies must begin with the recognition that education is profoundly political in its processes, institutional practices and social purposes. Nor is this a Thatcher novelty. The history of English demonstrates that it has helped to construct and disseminate particular definitions of personal identity, social relationships, national history, society and culture which are necessary to the reproduction of existing injustice and inequality. The liberal-progressive tradition, for all its achievements, has not disturbed that happy settlement. Nor will it ever do so. What we need is an English Studies which is committed to an entirely different form of cultural practice within the wider movement for change in Britain towards 2000.

At its final meeting, Commission 13 turned to the future of creative writing in the classroom. We looked at another long essay by one of the leaders, David Jackson of Nottingham. It attacked "romantic individualism" as encouraged in creative writing classes of the past and advocated group writing as a more democratic substitute. Group writing, it said, encourages writers to move out of the narrowness of private expression and deal with the broader social realities: life in the factories, housing tenants' meetings, activities at working class health centers.

As the final meeting drew to a close, someone handed me a copy of *From Egypt Road to Cairo Street*, a community literary magazine published in Nottingham. It contained much poetry. "View from the Castle" by Jem Woolley was one of the poems.

VIEW FROM THE CASTLE

I once went up to the castle
and watched the life-blood draining
away
from the city
at 5 p.m.
Then I went down to the streets,
and observed the regimented entertainment.

7 per cent of the people own
83 per cent of the wealth.
It's difficult to make that sound
poetic;
the sounds grate in the roof of your
mouth.
These days they don't build castles
to keep themselves in, and the others
out.
They're far too smart to make it too
obvious,
now they build their defences in peoples minds.

The television drones its constant
drivel,
Komedy, Kwiz-games, American
kops,
the stereotyping never stops—
be a real woman, be a real man,
wear our perfume, drink 17 pints,
so you know who you're with
when you turn out the lights.

Jem Woolley was identified as a person who "studied history at university, which might well have prepared him for his present stint of unemployment."

The poem seemed another lament for the passing of the living intuitive faculty; I sat idly wondering what F.R. Leavis would think of Jem

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Woolley's work. I turned to the teacher sitting next to me and pointed to Woolley's poem and handed her the magazine. She smiled and took it. After a while I told her I thought it was interesting that Woolley and Leavis and Lawrence and most of the people here in the commission all saw the same problems, yet I'd bet they wouldn't agree on ways to deal with them.

"I don't know where I'm going or what I'm doing after all this talk here at the conference," she said to me. "It's all so confusing."

"One American who's been to some of our sessions thinks you people want to replace the Thatcher government with a communist government."

"Well, maybe some of these people would, but I don't know. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but this government hasn't done a thing for us teachers. It gave the police a big raise, though."

I wondered if she was from the countryside. I asked her about Terry Eagleton.

She said she hadn't heard of him before the other night. "I plan to buy his book, though. I want to read that."

One of the leaders stood to sum up what he felt Commission 13 had accomplished. In the past, he said, people have always expected English teachers to be fault finders. People expected us to correct mistakes in punctuation and pronunciation. Meaning was supposed to be secondary for us. We will change that. We will begin looking at more than grammar. We must begin looking at meaning.

At the very end, David Light listed what he called the goals of the new English:

* Widen the range of cultural materials used in English classrooms;
* Recognize the validity of working class language and abandon loyalties to the elitism of standard English;
* Knock literature off its pedestal and substitute popular readings from many sources.

I walked back to Hugh Stewart past the library. The library was advertising its autumn International Symposium on D.H. Lawrence in the Modern World, "Now, fifty-five years after his death, it is an established part of the twentieth century literary canon, but the nature of his achievement is still the subject of debate. . . ." □

AMERICAN EYE

2700 Miles to Amarillo

HOLLIS GIAMMATTEO

We were on a peace walk initiated by women, an eleven-month journey from the Naval Submarine Base in Bangor, Washington to the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, Texas (the final assembly point for all nuclear warheads in the U.S.), to the Naval Weapons Station in Charleston, South Carolina. We walked along the railroad tracks, following the route of the White Train.* March 21, 1984, the first day of spring, was our departure day and that morning, launched lovingly by the Ground Zero community from the Submarine Base gates, we headed south toward Portland, a 10-day walk away. Giddy with the challenge of *that* distance, no one could yet take in the achievement of Texas, 2,700 miles away.

We were 8 women, carrying everything in 2 carts covered brightly with stickers, peace flags and banners, looking not quite of this century, and a little bit like ships. In the carts, the gear and the clothes to last 6 months, and the films and literature that would constitute our programs, given almost every evening in almost every town along the way.

We'd spent from November of 1983 to February of 1984 organizing; the goal, as we saw it, was to broaden the already existing network of communities that vigiled and prayerfully resisted the Train, and to share information with the uninformed, the disinterested, and, to be sure, the opposed. Often this cast us in the role of listeners. We were helped by key groups and individuals in each state, and by March had a pretty firm grasp on our routing, our contacts and our program commitments. There were of course some grave gaps in the knowing. Wyoming, for example, presented a 120 mile stretch of desert; Nebraska would prove most frustrating, as town after town and church after church reneged on their sponsorship. We'd learn to balance adherence to our rules with flexibility.

We learned "on the job." Press and media attention forced us quickly to be concise and counter-manipulative. Initially, I'd be disarmingly sincere, with lots of heart, dropping Ram Dass bon mots and New Age panaceas, speeching on moral integrity and taking risks. Since I spoke in lavish paragraphs, inviting the reporter to meander with me through the turnings of my mind, I was awfully surprised to find, in all this, that maybe one sentence was printed—and that, terribly out of context. "Ms. Giammatteo, 36, says she has no idea why she's walking, but that she'll probably find out along the way." I was coming off like a flake; nothing to do but figure out what was wanted, in their terms, and then approach an interview with an agenda that would avoid our being typed as "protesters."

As I got more willing to shape our information and opinions into the conventional news format, I discovered that effective peace work requires a focus on team work; that press and media and the work are all involved in redefining what is "news." As we walked, I think we witnessed a growing concern in the media not to shrug off peace work and its philosophies as not-news. It was becoming O.K., publicly, to cover peace. Yes, the Walk was good copy ("How many pairs of shoes did you go through?" "Are you ladies married?" "What was your worst experience on the road?"), and our

*The White Train, once truly and eerily white like the spectre of death it is, traveled the country unseen for 20 years. In 1982, finally, through a reporter's tip, Jim Douglass, co-founder of the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, tracked the Train back to its source, the Pantex Plant, and the Tracks Campaign was born. In February 1985, the Department of Energy (DOE) painted the Train the various colors of the freight lines that haul it through its 14 host states. It is now fondly referred to as the Painted Train.

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label, "resisters" encouraged a focus on conflicts and confrontation, but we insisted on speaking about nonviolence and the building of a peace-filled world as well. The Walk was not merely a reaction to an administration pledged to nuclear proliferation in an election year, but was the *presence* of peace.

I knew from the beginning that ours would be an experiment in community; I just didn't know how we eight would get there, for it is one thing to sit around a table, throwing out words like "trust" and "commitment," and another to be in the experience, caught off guard by a vivid demonstration of someone's very different point of view. Was the Walk about community, or about specific action? Where did the two meet? If they didn't, was it a failure of peace? We had first to recognize that peace is not the absence of conflict. Then we all had to stop judging each other for not being the same. In the beginning was the group-pounce mode, for example. A car would pull up, curious, ask what we were doing. We'd rush around, like fish to a feed, and if the response was adverse, I think we all felt obliged to take it on, as if jumping into a moral wrestling match. A narrow urgency compelled us to try to convince them—of American greed fostering the arms race; of the need to reaffirm human value over the extreme and bizarre reverence for *things*; of the terrible casualties of the nuclear . . . what? What is the umbrella word for the testing and the waste sites and the weapons development centers and the assembly plants and the military installations and the trains and the power plants and the mines and the pilings? For the enormity, we had no word, only—as it must have appeared to the curious—glazed eyes and serial ravings. So, the curious would shake a head and deliver an equally impassioned set of truths, and we'd part, protective of our truths, estranged. Finally we learned not to descend as clouds of witness, but one on one, to engage and endure, and often to part as friends. This took a while, and as we each had different styles of "confrontation," it also took a while to trust that each would not abuse her right to do her job in her own way, unobstructed and unjudged.

Then, there was the open road. Periodically I fall under its spell, Whitman-crazed, or like Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows* convinced that those who voyage are in touch with the belonging uncovered in homelessness, the magic of going lightly. I fancy myself being a poem during these times, with a great heritage, as all poems have, and I forgave myself the making and singing of praises. We thought often of how the nature of diplomacy would change if everyone made such walking a part of their lives from time to time. For you've no option but to trust your neighbor. We grow by wandering; we open to the amazing generosity of others when we ourselves have little; we step again into the natural world where time and the passing of miles, which won't be hurried, and seasons and the powerful moods of the sun settle us back to the good humility, and to a knowledge strong as a pulse that, if we open to it, we can communicate, fiercely and gently with God.

Vancouver, WA
March 31, 1984

We are becoming obsessed with the banner. Its message, "White Train Threatens Life on Earth," is grimly offered to the scenery on this small back road, and the wind billows it backward. We're such a tiny group. Several have decided not to walk because of colds, and Maura's gone on to Portland, afraid that her cough is growing into something serious. We five have all we can take of "visibility" tasks, struggling with the banner and push-pulling the carts up the endless hills. Mt. St. Helens is pluming in the distance, one flank sooty. Dark, purply clouds gather in an orange sky above her; a funnel takes shape to her right. I pull out my tornado story, and the temperature drops, and we make a turn straight into the rain.

I am suddenly Mother Courage in the modern world, and weary. Unseen on these back roads, I am aware of how useful the press and media are to the work. I get to thinking that maybe the Walk will continue in this kind of void, in the back country, where occasional cars see our gypsy group as crazy women, off to the hills for holiday. A car slows, stops; a woman reads our banner: "White Train Theaters Life on Earth," she reads out loud, and nods and puts on a grave face of understanding.

We leave the back country and come out to the major highway: hamburger and 7-Eleven chains; the malls; six-lane heavy traffic, and exhaustion. It's five o'clock, with six more miles to go. I think I can't go on, and say as much. Sande, bless her, water streaming down her plastic poncho into her pink tennis shoes, gently explains that her vision is of covering every mile by at least one set of feet. We heal the earth as we go, she says, and even though no one else but we will know it, the chain from Bangor to the East Coast must be laid down link by link, unbroken. She believes in this healing. I look up, through my hats, at the strip—the junk of it, our car culture; the convenience stores and varietal McDonald's; the prefab cubes and emporia of gathering and getting; the utter absence of beauty; the disregard. "I can't heal this," I say.

"Especially this," she says. "It is important."

But they cut down trees for this, and bulldoze hills. I jump the six lanes and go buy beer for later, when, I think, my offended eyes will have earned a long hot bath and at least two Heinekens.

Camas, WA
April 6

Morning tea led to bagels with marmelade. Two miles down the road, a frenzied search under the tarp produced the five-pound bag of roasted soybeans, which once found was eaten with oranges and an ice cream bar the gas station man, incredulous at our journey, treated us all to; alas, no seconds. Two miles later, another undisciplined plunge into the soybeans, and an apple. I barely made it to lunch an hour later, which we ate in a baseball dugout. That felt like trench warfare, what with the mud and the pouring rain, and our plastic layers that mostly held the damp inside us. We pulled out tuna fish and cheese; hard boiled eggs; homemade applesauce and apricot preserves, which went wonderfully well on my margarine-egg sandwich; more apples; bread. No soybeans. Lunch over and packed away, one mile down the road the absolute need for chocolate overcame me, and I ducked into a corner store and bought three bars, eating them as I ran to catch up. We ended up, 20 minutes later, in a dark Italian restaurant. The owner had seen us on the road and invited us in for free coffee, and to dry off. He threw cheesecake into the bargain, and by four o'clock, I was so

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sugared and soybeaned and caffeined out, that the clean life, and the path toward clarity, seemed very distant.

Washougal
April 6
They can be a thrill, these little towns. Our banner and carts create a heartening stir today. Our coordinator came out to walk with us. When this happens, the excitement of those who have prepared for our arrival lifts me out of my private *why*, and I'm restored by the symbolic power of the Walk. In our simple, not-to-be-hurried, self-reliant act, we are connecting Bangor, Washington to Amarillo, Texas to Charleston, South Carolina. Are we mad?

Anyway she is here to meet us, inappropriately shod, of course. People seem to have lost touch with their feet, and relate to the Walk initially as a problem in footwear. This is a small rebellion, our living with one pair of shoes for six months, in an era that has bullied us with choices by making Occasions instead of making Do.

The rain is back. We parade around the business loop at the suggestion of our coordinator, a young woman eager to make of our presence a catalyst for forming a peace group common both to Camas and Washougal. The town reporter is waiting. Two high-school girls rush us in a parking lot, and squeeze $10 into my hand. They linger to talk with Terri about organizing students to vigil the Train. We parade; cars honk; V signs are flashed. One salty old man calls out from his car window, "We need more of those White Trains!" We respond with humor, but when it comes to the getting out of the car, and the yelling at my face, I'm not sure what I'll do, nor how I feel right now about engaging. I admire anyone who offers a response, though. Even a slur is preferable to indifference; a thought sets into motion other thoughts, banging up against and rearranging each other.

I'm not at home in the media of slogans and contempt. Is the goal to convince or listen? That listening is *not* a passive mode will require some practice, I think. I'm not a position, only an act that seeks integrity.

Stevenson, WA
April 7
Finally and officially we cross out of the wetness. We seem to step over a line cutting the Cascades, separating wet from dry; separating the lush moss coverings of rocks and trees that characterize Western Washington from a sparseness here, a skeleton apparent; separating the ubiquitous gray from clear sky. We walk toward Stevenson, to a progam tonight hosted by the Charismatic Catholics; 23 miles out of Washougal, we finally leave the rain. Hills loom, dotted with dry brush and feeding cows. The sky opens. Mt. Hood shockingly appears. Truly, like the song, the Columbia River rolls on. In homage to Woodie Guthrie we start to sing it, managing only the first two lines.

The Columbia River Gorge is a wide, great place where the green hills, terraced here and there with orchards, plummet toward the river on the Oregon side while dropping softly out of Washington. And the tracks; always, the tracks. Trains are frequent; a continual hint of 4th-grade geography class rushes by, a catalogue of natural resources—grain; wood chips; coal. There can't be any haste in walking, and it's such a relief to be forced out of my habitual frenzy.

I am walking, in a sense, to leave my haste. That's become a focus. When I am—and where—a late 20th-century American, is wrapped up in haste. I call that living in the belly of the beast, because my country's military and economic power shapes my personal sense of power, duty and entitlement, and because life is so fast, an avalanche of stimuli, events and relationships that easily lets slip the fact that one does, indeed, make choices. I often sit in a grief of overwhelm, dreaming of a time of yea-saying only to the precious. The dream, alas, reads like a recipe—so many dashes of service blended in with the exquisite pleasures: music, books; so many incremental learnings, like building one's own house, mixed into a casserole of mindfulness salted with the experience of God. I haven't got the hang of time yet, and so to walk is to walk away from pressure, toward sky and happenstance.

The tracks thin out in the distance; to the left, cliffs, on the right, the once wild river, poisoned and tamed. Dams and irrigation determine its flow; nuclear power plants make it one of the most radioactive bodies of water in the world. Nine plants, not all operating, on the Bend alone—that 40-mile stretch of river where it takes its turn from the Tri-cities (Hanford Reservation) west, to the Pacific. I bring the Train into my heart when I take in this truth and this beauty.

We approach a scenic point off Highway 14. Beacon Rock, it's called, second largest of its kind after Gibraltar. The road climbs, the wind kicks up fiercely, the sun appears. Off come ponchos and sweaters; we throw ourselves into the spirit of a picnic lunch, even as our Washougal friends are waiting by the Rock, laying it out along with thermoses of coffee, chocolate, and tea. We take off our packs noticing the narrow switchbacks carved high up into the Rock. A plaque explains that the Philadelphia Biddle family donated the Rock to Washington a hundred years ago, and I prance around, pretending to be proud, for I have been a Philadelphian for a time, however bitterly. Someone hands me tuna fish. The weather changes suddenly again. We all, 23 now with guests, huddle around the heavy picnic table that, laughing, we dragged up the slope into the seductive sun. Potato chips appear. We start devouring, but the wind blows them away and then the rain comes.

I say, after it becomes clear that the rain is permanent, "There's a little bit of denial going on here. I mean, here we all sit, pretending we're not freezing. We should acknowledge, at least, that we'll get hypothermia." No one listens.

It starts sleeting and everything blows away except the table. Food, of course, has never tasted better; it all seems quite gourmet: the carrot

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sticks; the browning apple; the recurring hard-boiled eggs; the tuna fish hunked out on travel-weary bread. The cold rain worsens. We heave collectively and pack up what remains.

The Train triggers my perception: the possibility of this day wiped out, blasted, gone, a day of potato chips and wind; hypothermia and timely comforts; the exquisite river rolling on despite our half-hummed song about it; the non sequitur of a Philadelphia Biddle giving a rock back to Washington. All I open to is made more poignant with the threat of its destruction; we deal in preciousness and walk to honor that. Just think, all this gone. It's like a play of opposites, our Train witness, a deepening passion for this life held in the tension of our deepening fear that it will be taken from us.

Stevenson to White Salmon, WA
April 8

Last night, a disquieting time. I felt roped in to support MA and Ellen at the evening program, while others went off to rest. MA suggested a Beyond War workshop; Ellen, the Train rap. Feeling grimly inadequate, and wanting desperately to creep off and write, I offered simply to "be there," a lousy compromise. I'm at a loss about what to say in the programs. A precedent has been set: give the history of the Train; recount vigorously and with passion the beginnings of the Tracks Campaign; show the film, perhaps; encourage questions. All this is designed to poke and prod and stimulate folks into recognizing the relationship between sexism, racism, classism and the arms race; *or* between American Life Style and the Train; *or*, oh, any number of ambitious moral posturings. I feel *I* am posturing. What right do I have to ask people to change their lives?

Every night it seems we reinvent the wheel, though. Should we throw in music; the satirical sketches we've prepared from my musical; meditations and readings? We'll never get good at the programs until we get a system going. We ought to have teams that could then take walk time off for planning the program. Until we agree on the need for prep time, our presentations will be slipshod and last-minute, burdened by exhaustion.

I know that is considered too controlling by some in the group. But what's "too" about it? One's style of presentation is different from another's, and surely we ought to encourage that. Again, it seems easier to react than to initiate; easier to grumble at the precedent than to create a new one. Blast.

Besides, I've been hard on myself lately, wanting to be a combination Jesse Jackson-Krishnamurti when I speak. Since this is the first time I've gone on the road as a messenger of peace, the expectation seems a bit steep. At this point, my message of peace could use a little revising. I am, alas, more interested in the casseroles arranged on the table than telling people what to do about the Train. I am more interested in having my feet rubbed than in assuming a responsibility for networking the peace groups from Portland through the Gorge. I am more interested in brushing my hair than in stepping through my haze to answer questions, some of them disastrous in this mood ("Have you gotten good weather?"), and some of them simply beyond my ken ("What are the comparable nuclear weapons systems in the USSR, and what are you doing about *that*?).

Our hosts are Charismatic Catholics—Dr. Naley, who as the dean of the church greeted me and then disappeared, and Paula, his wife, who stayed. The Naleys have 16 foster children, four of whom are here at the potluck. Since MA and Ellen had program preparations to make before dinner, I play m.c. The first thing I do in this capacity is flee into the bathroom for a cigarette. Then I brush my hair, longing for a scotch and an evening of music, and then I open the door, and encounter John.

John is the type who's all "Wow gee you're terrific, how did you ever come to do this, anyhow?" and then when you tell him, answering personally, of course, because that's what his attention elicits, he pounces, because the answer isn't General Truth. He takes it as, "Look what *you're* not doing for the world." Dangerous. How do I get out of this one? Can I slide undetected toward Connie, the young woman on my right feeding her baby? I notice that the room is full of children—Paula's older boys and a lot of 2-to-3-year-olds. The decibel level rises. Dinner winding down, the novelty of the Walk does too, muscle and mileage questions answered, and the focus returns to child-related matters. John inserts himself, talks at my face, taking some wild spin around Soviet paranoia, and things I do not understand thrown in from his military experience. All I'd said was my hope for grass-roots organizing. I slide into despair.

"I must be tireder than I think," I think, and lean back toward Connie's baby, kissing her apricot cheek, overhearing John then say to Ellen, "I'm not sure I really am the *sort* for peace."

Barbara saves the evening. Our Stevenson connection, she is earnest, present to the intended spirit of the evening, and desiring to form a peace group here. Her concerns restore the focus that baby cries, tag and scattered toys threaten to diffuse. We scrape our chairs into a circle, and MA begins with the question, "What is your own experience of war?" Silence. The group bends in collective concentration to the middle. Paula's boys giggle—all but one, who looks 12, going on 48. This is Matthew, a friend of her boys. He's a cartoon-weird type, so very grave he is about the Train, all big-eared and map crazy. When it's his turn to speak, the boys put hands up to bursting cheeks and explode into laughter, running out of the room. Matthew perseveres, a look of pale wonder on his solemn face. His uncle was killed in Viet Nam; he will not forget the stories, the return of the body, the funeral. The boys' laughter is sharp in the room. I don't understand, and my eyes meet Matthew's. They have abandoned him, and I want him to know I'll hang around.

I am amazed by this group, scattered and baby-talking and seemingly indifferent. Terri is, too. Her story was about losing a great grandmother to a Nazi concentration camp, tears making her voice quiver. The boys laughed then, too, not at Terri, but out of inattentiveness. She writes me a note in her anger, and we go outside to smoke.

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Tri-cities & the Hanford Reservation (Richland, Pasco, Kennewick, WA) April 17

> We trigger their faith in themselves as instruments of peace. We charge them as projections.

It is humbling to take in gratitude. Last night, a physicist from the Hanford Reservation, through Batelle (he has been very brave about taking a moral stance against Batelle's defense contracts, at great personal risk), made us a very special welcome on behalf of the World Citizens for Peace. There are twenty-five or so at the gathering, including young children. I am often touched by their presence because here we all sit, adults, somber, or terrified toward eloquence, or stiff with rage, sharing our nuclear stories, and the children's innocence is a haunting counterpoint. Their unguarded and joyful expectation that life will go on, proceeding from ball to laps to dinner, jibes well with holocaust, because you can't see a child's face before the wreck of Hiroshima and not just go crazy with grief, and want to go say to Caspar Weinberger, "We don't want that kind of protection. No enemy is enemy enough to endure that kind of suffering at anyone's hands."

It *is* intense here; the Hanford Reservation, of course, being the economy—has been since WW II—it is a tiny, brave minority that goes against the nuclear tide. And so the intensity in this room is also because our presence gives these brave few strength.

Jim reads his favorite passage from the Gospel according to Luke: the disciples, with much to-do, are cast out of their safe territory as sheep among wolves. In faith they are asked to make their journeys without money, shoes, material possessions. As he reads the passage, initially lost on me because of the "go forths" and hefty Biblicals, I suddenly realize that he is seeing *us* in this context. First moved, gradually guilty, I think, "I am not doing enough, neither increasing my understanding of nuclear issues, nor going forth without money, food, and especially not without shoes; do not deserve such pulsating respect."

And then something happens. It doesn't ease my pangs for increased doing, but it lets me accept his intensity—theirs really—for the whole evening is one of gratitude. The Walk moves people regardless of the

DAVID BOTTOMS

AN OLD HYMN FOR IAN JENKINS

All things we value in terms of contrast,
the Ian Jenkins walking tour of New York
taught me that. Chelsea, The Bowery,
Little Italy, the long track
across China Town, my round eyes opening
to the light of the immigrant East.
And in the Garden of the Golden Dragon,
you dissecting my displacement,
punctuating with the click of chopsticks
the Jenkins theory of urban alienation.
That analogy of the hive-dweller,
his drone-like problems with identity,
that whole argument for territory,
sinks in now with the sunlight raining
through the gaps in these trees.
And as we cross the field from the house
to the pond, still groggy from the Mets
game, the late miles on the turnpike,
I know why you and the upper West Side
zip to these mountains on weekends.
Last night, through the dead black
of time, a horse snorted in the woods,
a carriage rocked down the wheel ruts
of the road and stopped in front
of the house. Downstairs the front door
slapped closed, and cards fluttered
like wings across tables, all I remember
of the house showing my sleep the past.
And what it neglected of the grounds,
the field where the local militia drilled
for the revolution, the Colonial graveyard
at the foot of the hill, you fill in,
from landmark to landmark, piecing time
and dirt like the rags of history's quilt.
I understand that. Southerners know
how a place can wrap you up in a dream.
And what this place puts me in mind of,
the clear river edging the green field,
the solid house beyond the graves,
are the elements of an old hymn,
Flatt and Scruggs wide open on your stereo,
their mansion over the hilltop, their land
of beautiful flowers where we'll never
grow old. What I'm talking about
is that place we go to save ourselves,
that place in the dream where the object
of the dream is place.

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walkers. The Walk triggers in people their yearning for peace, not as a concept, but as a daily practice. Meeting us releases the power of hope, a deep, perhaps untalked about resolve. That's why it's so intense sometimes, and why I haven't words to meet it with. Only heart. They are projecting their yearning and believing selves. So of course it will not do to answer with a stammering confession of my own inadequacies, or to lessen that charge with a humorous account of my blisters. It will do only to take the power of that gratitude in, let it settle in the heart and travel to the toes and believe that when we, all of us, work, a great force of good is released, like a spirit dispensing hope over our joined and worried souls.

Montpelier, ID
June 3

On the road it is necessary sometimes to *not* be nice. I don't mean that defensively, city street smarts meets the great outdoors. I mean, niceness has nothing to do with describing who we are to those who ask, with bearing witness. Now, niceness has its place, but I need to expand my repertoire, and when I "do" polite, let it issue from respect and not from habit. Mom's Good Girl tapes and Dad's approval are the voices in my head; "be obedient" and "for God's sake, smile" still bicker for attention. In recent confrontations, my insides turn out. First I'm angry. Then I try to fix it with that hopeless New Age edict, "don't be so judgmental." The current confrontation sparked by the question (asked a dozen times a day), "What about the Russians?" Now, that's a good question, but it's often asked in the spirit of a *coup de grâce*: "Ha-Ha, what do you know, my stupid girls? Go march *there*; you'll see what freedom is!" By assuming that we're *for* the Russians, that that is what it is to be *for* peace, the common concern, however many variables inform the task of making peace, gets swept away. It's like focusing on the youth and idealism of the student protests in the '60s in order not to take seriously the substantial concerns. It's like confusing justice with what the judge is wearing.

I've got to push through it, though, my knee-jerk rage at being closed out by ignorance like this, and then, my silence. A goal—let anger be the fuel, and let my speaking ride it.

Montpelier, "another Mormon town," we're warned, "99%," and this evening we're hosted by the 1% remaining—the civilized, the Presbyterian. They await us, four old women in red pants-suits and bright pins, with their kind stew and conditional interest. Also, two old men, who sit behind pillars. The women hover with busy regard. They ask questions and turn away mid-answer in their worry over place settings and where is everyone and will they be in time for dinner? Some of us are napping; some, newly arrived, stretch out in the sun exhausted after a hilly, windy and dry 20 miles. We're outside all day, sometimes walking alone, a line of brightly-clothed women over several miles. Once we were mistaken for a Mormon Youth Group, our "youth" and carts thought to be a commemoration of the Mormons' walk to Idaho. You can find common ground in the oddest places. Sometimes we walk in clusters, gesturing, taking up the road, reviewing yesterday's quirks and tangles and anticipating new ones. We arrive here in shifts and our hosts seem impatient.

The hosts discharge their Christian duty, pulling down over the guests a skrim of good, therefore edifying, behavior. This rarely bodes well for either party. We want to touch hearts and touch, if you will, some of the original, habit-shattering, rough stuff that is the foundation of Christianity. We do not wish to be outfitted in good.

Helen seems in charge and lines us up by a vat of beef stew and a tray of Jell-o salad. All but two of us are vegetarians, a fine start. We stagger ourselves, politely, among our hosts. I look across at Sande. Her face is very red. She sits beside Carl, who is boasting about the rifle he carries in his truck. She's staring at the wall and hasn't touched her Jell-o salad.

Ruth and Jerry, meanwhile, represent hope. Sure enough, it's revealed that they have owned, written for and run the town newspaper for some 30 years, and they've just sold it. "We're the town radicals," Ruth keeps saying, and I laugh along with her, missing the derision. I do not know that I am sitting in the middle of a feud.

Helen is telling stories of her girlhood. "When I was a girl," she says, "why, we used to throw the liver and the innards to the darkies. And they were glad for it. *Now* what with the price of meat, who wouldn't be?" There is a stunned silence.

After dinner, Helen wants us to stand up individually and speak. It feels like Ralpha Senderwitz's School of Public Address in Allentown, PA. At 15 I went there, to learn the Drama, and how to speak with poise in public, however inane the subject of my speech. Helen expects little public addresses, well-placed between coffee and dessert, and we feel bullied, not to mention underdressed. She asks questions, looks up grandly and announces, "dessert, dessert." She is attempting to treat the evening as a diplomatic exercise, and so charges through it like a hostess to delinquent five year olds. If she didn't remind me of my grandmother, and my own roots where fear, prejudice, and the limitations of experience are, my frustration might be reduced to a clear broth of anger. But this is thick soup, theatre, both which are, of course, the Walk.

Ruth, with her halo of Colette frizz, her direct inquisitive eyes, holds her own at the other end of the table, still muttering "town radicals"; admonishing, to herself, "they are so conservative, so conservative," off on some private reckoning of the cruelties done them and their paper over the years. Her energy stops there, dead-ends in slight. Jerry doesn't say much. He is long and slim, androgynous. He curves in, holding himself off a little to the side. Fifteen years Ruth's elder, this seems part of the town's long sustained reproach. I am out of touch with small town proprieties and grudges. And of course my own, played out in the more dramatic setting of a peace walk, a road show, a mission, are more easily called by other hearty names—experiments in feminism; spiritual questing. Anyway, Jerry smokes, tiredly, a man of conscience in a town of uncatholic concerns, where patriotism is a catch-all for conformity, and conformity means survival. I cannot read defeat into his tired smoking, only perhaps a desire to sit, and enjoy others' struggles, once similar to his own.

The room is an ensemble of soliloquies, and Thelma, the only woman not in a red pants-suit, rises above it with earnest questions. Then she asks, "What about the Russians?" with a sweet smile, the question bursting like a revelation of our young, unpracticed peace.

Michael tip-toes to the table and

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whispers to his mother, Pat. They walk away together. Now it is time to be *on*, and to try to toughen up the Good Girl recitations toward Train talk and peace, more along the lines of Barbara Deming, less Ding Dong School. Patty starts. I see the fervor in her eyes, and suspect that the ensuing speech might exert an appeal elsewhere. She is passionate, describing the power of witness; the transformation of our values. I am moved. It's a good reminder to me of the long haul commitment to the Walk, and of why I'm sitting here in this church basement.

Pat and Michael return. Of all things, she is carrying a mop, and Michael giggles. "Excuse me," she says, "we seem to be experiencing a flood. There is a geyser in the middle of the floor."

The energy geysers, too. Everyone but the walkers is in a flurry of "what?" and "where?" The peace gathering is broken and we few remain inside a comedy of errors, dumbfounded. Helen rushes to the bathroom in an attempt to aid. She flushes the toilet endlessly, and with every flush, gallons of raw sewage boil up from the drain in the middle of the room. Michael has filled a bucket, runs for another, and a bucket brigade is started, to run the filth up and out the door. Someone yells, "For god's sake, stop flushing!" and Helen emerges, confused.

There is no peace left in the basement. I head for the stairs, longing for fresh air and distance. Helen grabs me. "Where are you going?"

I say, "To wait until this is over, and then to be taken wherever I'm staying the night. We're all exhausted."

"You can't go yet," she says. "I've called the town photographer and she's on her way. She's making a very special point to be here. She's already late for a wedding."

"All right," I say, "we'll wait for a little while, but I'd really appreciate getting it organized soon." Again I start for the stairs.

"About tomorrow," she continues, "if some of you could come to Sunday service, we'll let you talk for five minutes before."

Puzzled by Helen's request under these, and any circumstances, I say, "Some of the walkers will be out on the road by four in the morning, and the rest of us will want to be out early to relieve them. So let's leave it at 'we'll see.' "

I corner Ruth, asking if she knows where we are to stay. With her, it seems, those of us not planning to be on the road at four. I ask her can she take us home soon. I am rank, on top of being exhausted, having camped, unwashed, for days. My hair, confined under my black Sicilian scarf, is a flattened fright, and my bones ache. Helen overhears, tsk tsking, "You're not dirty, dear, and you don't smell at all." That does it. It seems an ultimate violation of my dwindling stockpile of truths, and I start to crumble.

The photographer arrives. She looks sullen and frankly put out, but that could be because of the mess in the middle of the floor. We file upstairs for pictures, seeking a patch of grass. Our feet are bare and as we walk onto the lawn, we feel simultaneously the dread ooze. We stand in the puddle of sewage. The photographer of course has no idea why we scream, why we arrange ourselves, bristling, in a row by the carts.

"Helen," I smile sweetly, "come here with us. I couldn't possibly have this event recorded without you." She wades through the ooze. I put my arm around her.

There is a time not to be the *good girl*, and so for the rest of the evening I am not, and try to find the boundary between personal integrity and rudeness—crossing over, I'm afraid. The photograph accomplished, I threaten in my levelest tone to have a nervous breakdown if not driven home instantly. Ruth believes me. Five of us pile into her car, leaving the rest to whatever Karma awaits them in the church with Helen. She has gone to call the plumber. He will come; the walkers will be there for him. He is a John Bircher. It seems the perfect ending to the day.

Ruth's and Jerry's street is named for them—that fact, characteristic of a small town and their place in it, remarkable to my urban anonymity. Theirs is a large house, split-level. We go in. I throw off my dirty clothes into a heap and stand before Ruth naked and ask, "Is it O.K. to do a wash?" She doesn't blink. She seems not to be surprised by the farcical evening or by being taken over now by a band of women teetering toward hysteria. Graciously, she shows us where to sleep, to shower and to eat. Something about our presence is feeding her, and my summation, "bizarre," turns into curiosity. Still I'm on my "kill-the-*good-girl*" kick, and after my shower, I go up and ask for scotch. Jerry smiles and brings out a bottle.

"Drink as much as you want," he says.

I do.

In the living-room, Sande is busy writing; Jerry reads the paper; Ellen and Ruth and I talk. Before this, Ruth and I had talked alone. She was explaining the big house—the space; the towels; the closets full of toys, useful for when the children and the grandchildren came. And then she explained her recent stroke; how it took her a year to learn to read again, and speak; how "ceiling" got all mixed up with "painting," and "shoe" with "plate"; how Jerry had slowly taught her to write and spell, but still there were moments of despair and disorientation.

Now we talk about the town and its politics; about their children, both gone east to practice medicine for the poor, the hungry, the disempowered; and about the Walk. Ruth is stuck on one thing, and that is fear. She can't imagine walking on the streets at night, let alone across the country, and I think, because of that, she begins to mother us most oppressively.

I wasn't sure if it was the stroke that kept her from hearing that we're not afraid, on that level, for our safety, or if it was her own fears, the scars from ostracism. I glimpse in Ruth my own undoing. She's accomplished much: the newspaper; conscientious and successful children; a loving marriage. She surrounds herself with art. Wyeth and Breughel reproductions hang on the walls, and there are shelves of books. Her fear is speaking to my *good girl*, that catch in the throat that happens when I ache to speak out honestly, with conviction, but don't, for fear of ridicule. My parent tapes are in me: "Rules and regulations, dear"; the belief that the unconventional is a phase, not the advance toward truth and clarity. Mother's first response to the Walk was, "people will laugh at you." So this is my own peculiar guard that stands before my heart. If I speak out against the "rules and regulations," and with feeling, I will be ridiculed. Now Ruth, here, is fearing for her life; I am fearing for my twisted sense of honor.

Ruth admires us as the ideals she will not practice; the conscience she will not be. I am sad for this. It reminds me that I'd greet those who

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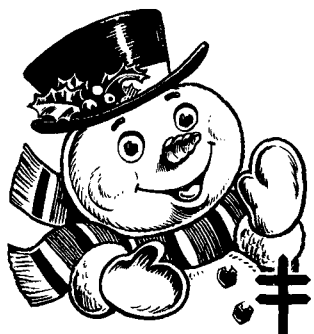

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climbed the mountains, or pulled timely, crystalline projects from their dreams, as if their lives taunted my limitations. I'd get stuck there, in comparison, not in the glad, participatory handshake of ingenious humanity. So I feel sorry for her a little and suggest different styles, myriad expressions of peace work, and doing what we can with what we've got, and other vague etceteras designed to reassure Ruth as much as me.

The next morning she is ablaze with mission. Blankets of laundry appear on the kitchen table, and plates of toast and scrambled eggs. If it weren't cold and drizzly; if we weren't aware of soon having to relieve the walkers, out in the cold since five, it would all feel like Mom packing us up for summer camp. Ruth administers to needs that she keeps creating in her excitement to be with us. Yes, we eat the toast, the eggs, more toast; we laugh when she returns with Sande from the walkers on the road to whom she has delivered warm cocoa, more toast.

There is tension. Sande knows we should be off; expects each of us to do what we can to facilitate a smooth getaway. But the comforts are seductive; the laundry, slow; the toast, good, and Ruth, a rocket of attention. I sit her down and ask for Helen's, Thelma's, and Carl's addresses. Painstakingly she writes them out in a slow tremble. Perhaps I shouldn't have asked. Perhaps writing is too difficult for her hand and memory. I do not want to blunder, and yet feel the pressure from Sande to leave, the impatience of others with this frenzied, stalled morning. She rushes in to Jerry in a terrible frustration. He has remained thoughtfully removed, buried in his paper. She cries for help and then returns to her scrawls on the paper. It is taking too much time. The others have cleaned up, gathered our belongings and put them out.

Our ride comes; we're ready. Ruth and Jerry walk us outside. There are tears in her eyes as she says, "When the Train comes, I don't know what I'll do. No one ever turns out. No one cares. I'll be the only one."

I cannot pretend not to understand. I've spent my entire adult life in cities, and I'm not in touch with the kind of small town conservatism that seems to kill creative and dissenting spirits. I can't really take in the repercussions of expressing unpopular opinions, of making waves, of insisting on truth from our institutions that are characterized by bland self-interest and hypocrisy. No, I am no saint, just naïve, and I say, perhaps blithely, "But Ruth, that's it! Make a sign, a huge sign, '*One* Woman for Peace,' and be at the tracks when the Train comes through." I describe my vision—the country holding hands in a 2700-mile human chain, bearing signs, flowers, photographs, candles to the Train when it comes through; not one town dark, allowing the dark passage of the Death Train.

We said that should she choose to vigil, something would catch fire over time—at the next vigil, three people, and then, a dozen; that consciousness has a way of spreading—the results, perhaps, immeasurable from our own vantage point in time.

We got in the car. Ruth was weeping, and Jerry too. "What is it," she said, "that sign? I'll do it. '*One* Woman for Peace'." And we left her, the image of a tiny, frightened woman, walking out of her house some night to meet the Train with her sign, "*One* Woman for Peace" held high.

That was more courage, I swear, than mine in the walking, for I was ready to walk, and although I encountered some fears, I did not set out with an agenda of past evils and present insecurities. And there was Ruth, with all her fears exposed, on the verge of being ready. Such love and gratitude I felt that day and wondered, had our *good girl* nauseas intermingled to make a little mutually blessed change?

Cokeville to
Fossil Butte National Monument, WY
June 5

> "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior."
> Thoreau, "Walden" (1849-54)

Today I yelled at a drunken man who gave MA and me a lift 10 miles up the road toward Fossil. He made me mad, and how much energy can you give to figuring where the alcohol stops and the man begins? Anyhow, he asked a lot of questions, barking them out with that male prerogative, that filling-up-space posture, where they interrupt a lot, to make you feel ridiculous, or they change the sub-

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ject, because they do. It's a posture of "men should speak their minds whatever the occasion, however unsuitable the contents, and in and out of turn." Meanwhile, I take a club to my politeness, calling it the flip side of that prerogative.

So I barked back. I assumed some male prerogative and shouted out my deep convictions, across MA's lap, across his Budweiser and through it, through my *good girl*, those polite concerns over not offending, through my fear of ridicule. I met the barking man on his own terms. I assaulted him with my vision of nonviolence. I shouted that, No, I did not need to get my facts and figures straight in order to understand the complexity of the issue; that my life was being messed with, thank you, by a system of violence and oppression, and that no amount of detail pro and con about the Russians and their weapons would take away that knowledge in my heart.

He said if his neighbors were beating on his kids, he'd go out and shoot the neighbors; you wouldn't solve that with this nonviolence crap, now would you?

I said, "Damn it, yes, you'd better, because if you go shoot your neighbor, then your kids will have learned that shooting *and* solving a problem are the same, and isn't it better to be neighborly and talk, so when it comes time to harvest the crop or solve the gopher problem, your neighbor is there ready to help out?"

And wouldn't it be better to talk to the kids, if they're getting beaten, and hear from them how it hurts, and what they want to do?

So it went, this little UN session over laps. It felt good to take my gag off, even though I was swearing and I thought that might be hypocritical. At least I didn't encounter his impossible invective with *good girl* "there-theres." We caught up with the group and got out, and he got out, too, to get another beer from his cooler in the bed of the pickup.

I'm in a gap of *should*, though; what *should* I be yelling? My reactions to his paranoia? My own loaded facts and figures? By convincing him, I'm just convincing me. I'm not podium material; I'd rather hug than slug, but this is a politics that makes me feel naïve and, alas, hysterical, in the manner of many women who seem to go at issues with their hearts in their voice box. □

1985

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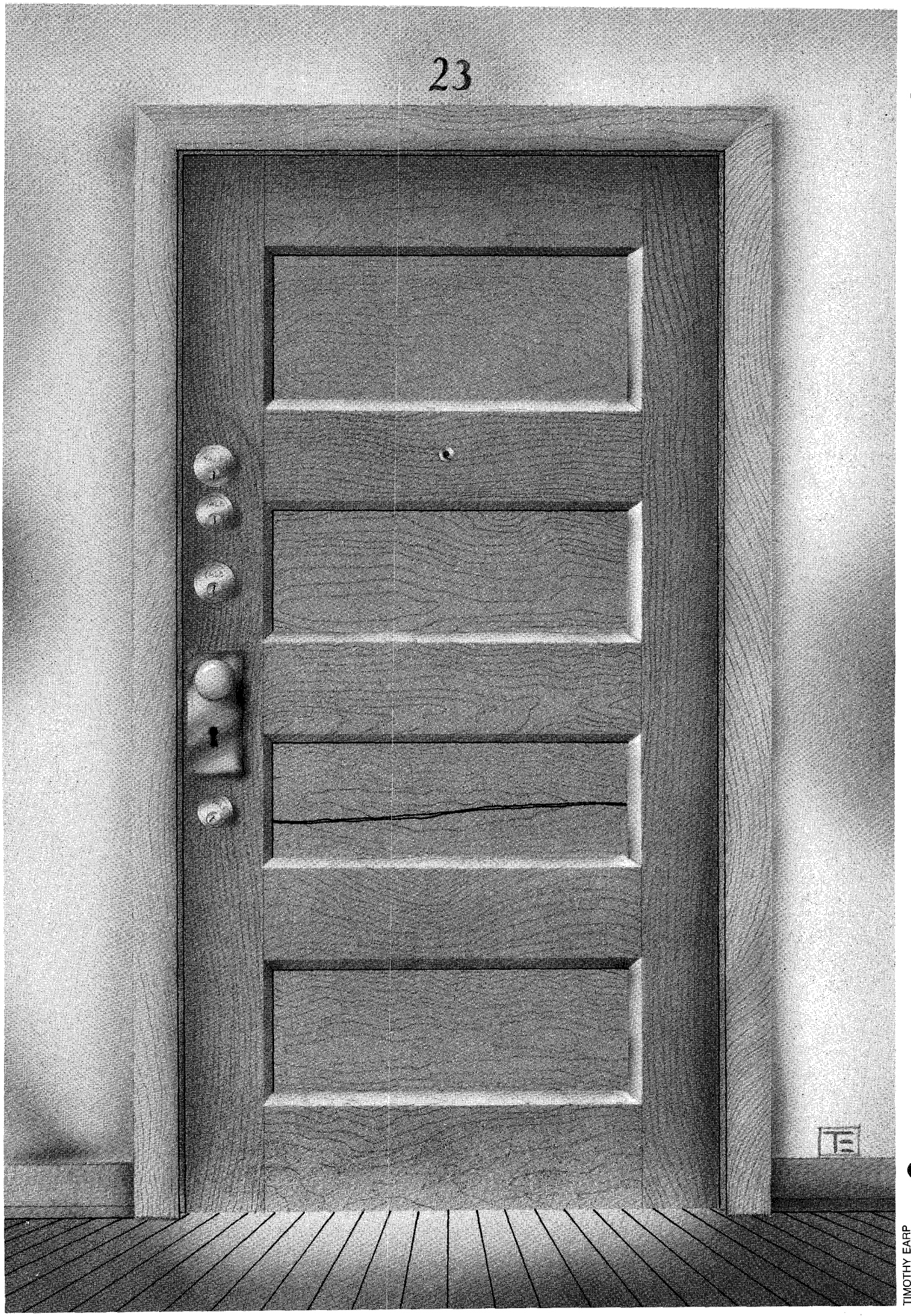

TIMOTHY EARP

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WHISTLE'S COMPLAINT

Edward Blaine

Whistle was fixing his Mustang on the fancy block. Some tall white lady came out and yelled it was against the law. "What kind of law is that?" he shouted back. He was laying on the street under the car, one tire off, his hands slippery with grease. She went back inside to call the police, but he relaxed. It was Sunday morning, nice and early, nobody out nowhere. Whistle knew what was up. He listened to the police calls with Charles, and it was always the same story. Every Sunday morning the police was tired. They was fagged out, with one little car for ten square miles and Saturday night heavy. The brothers had too much to drink, or a Rasta beat his wife, maybe worse. Now the night was over, and all the police wanted was to park on a dead end street and wait for their shift to end. Whistle looked up at the big trees that arched over the block. He stretched out in the gutter and watched the blue summer sky going outward forever. He was in a tunnel of leaves under that sky, dazzled by spokes of light flashing in the dark. He was where he wanted to be, laying on the street with the old fine houses, all of them sitting way back behind cut green lawns. Whistle got up and walked over to somebody's lawn. He lay down on the grass, then rolled over in it. His eyes was burning, but he could smell the dirt, the green. It made him think of home.

Whistle didn't turn when the car pulled up. It came down the street slow and slid over to the curb. Nobody got out. He knew what was going on, but he didn't move. He scrunched up his eyes so the morning sun could make cobwebs in the leaves overhead. He rolled over face down on the lawn and smelled deep. They could arrest him for that. They could bust his head wide open and say what they pleased. A car door opened, then slammed shut. Whistle made himself limp. He wanted to be harrassed, to show what was what and who was right. Sitting up, he saw the boy in the policeman's suit.

"This is private property," the boy said. "You can't just lay down on somebody's lawn."

Whistle scrambled to his feet in mock fear. He backed away and shuffled his feet. The boy was private security, scared out of his pants. "I was out late, man. I got wiped out."

"Well, you can't stay here. It's against the law."

"What law is that?"

"There's a law, a statute. It's on the books. Nobody's allowed to just lay down on a homeowner's lawn. It's trespassing. They got fines for it in this country."

"What you mean in this country?" It made Whistle mad, and he had to walk back to where the livery was jacked up and look around like somebody was watching him. "I live here same as you!" he said. "I got my chauffeur's license!"

"Well, you better get out of here. I had a complaint." The boy had backed up to his security car, opening the door on the driver's side. When he got in and started his motor, he said something mean. It had something to do with getting the hell out of there.

Whistle let him go. He scraped the dirt off his shoes, then wriggled under the Mustang again. Oily parts, the front tire laying out in the street—these were *his things*. Who was this security boy to tell him what to do?

Tracy said he made a mess. She said if he was smart like Charles Francis he could have a store. He said he didn't want no store, the mangoes going bad, getting shut up from morning till night. He was a taximan, and if he had himself a fine Peugeot, the people would make them rich. They got along as it was. Once the Mustang was all broke down, the body rusted through, the tires wore out. She didn't know him then, but if she did, she would of said, "That's my man—he made that car new!" In less than a week he did it. He used his torch, then spread on compound. He worked with the electric sander and bought used tires, all four with enough tread to get started. He took apart the motor and bought what he had to, points, plugs, a new battery. Maybe Whistle didn't have no money, but he had people that believed in him. He took out loans and wrote the names in a little book he carried in his back pocket. When he was done, he spray painted the body metallic blue and lettered *livery* with dips and swirls on the front fenders. He took that car way out the first day and got lost in Queens. The next day he didn't make enough for gas, but he prayed it would be different, and soon it was. When he met Tracy, she was big for six months and he was making forty dollars a day, more on weekends. She laughed at his jokes and showed off her gold teeth. She swore he was lying when he said he got the Mustang for a hundred dollars. "That car's a money-maker," she used to say. "Ain't nobody sell it so cheap!"

The tall lady was out on her porch. She was talking to a man with a little beard and glasses. He was all dressed up in a dark suit, shaking his head yes while she pointed at Whistle under the Mustang. She was chopping at the air and saying nasty things.

Whistle pushed himself further under the car. They was saying he was no citizen. They was saying he had no business on the street, and if he knew what was good for him, he would put his old car together and drive away. What did they expect? If a rich man has to fix his car, he takes it to a garage and pays the man whatever outrageous price it costs. A poor man has to do it himself, laying in the gutter and rubbing his nose in the dirt. Whistle held his breath. He watched the security car slow down, pass. If he was a man, he would stand up and shake his fist at the tall lady. He would tell her to shut up.

Tracy said he was her lover man. She said she liked it when he lay down in back of her and talked about how it would be when he owned his Peugeot, biting her ear, or

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when he kissed her round belly and talked his talk to the baby inside, first Ridley, then Ras. She said it was foolish, letting him touch her nevertheless, thrashing in the bed and holding his head down.

"What're you doing here?" It was the police this time, no mistake. Whistle squirmed out from under. He said it was no problem. He would put everything together quick. "We have a complaint," the policeman said. "We hear you've been warned." Whistle apologized. He said he was working as fast as he could, holding his head down, not daring to look at the police car blocking the street. "You have a license, registration?" Whistle fished out his chauffeur's license, and the policeman studied the glum photo attached to it, then took out his pad. He was half finished with the ticket before Whistle knew what was going on.

"What you doin'? I ain't done nothin' wrong."

"You see that pump?"

"Ain't that close, man."

"Looks like it to me." The policeman looked up to figure the distance. He had cold eyes.

"Don't do it, officer. I got too many points."

"Listen, Mr. Thomas, don't ask me to stop. You're parked too close to the pump. What's more, it's illegal to jack up your vehicle on a residential street and take out half the motor. You've broken the law. Face it."

Whistle couldn't say if the policeman wanted a bribe. Later, standing at the cash register with Charles Francis, he explained how it was. "In Jamaica, you know these things. Here I don' know. I don' know if they want money or not."

"It's good you didn't do it," Charles said. "I bet that lady's somebody."

"I don' care who she is, man. I was fixin' my car!"

"You still don't understand."

"Was I hurtin' somebody?"

"That's beside the point. You was breakin' the law!"

"I'd like to see that law."

"You're ridiculous, man. It's certain to be there. If you were a man of property, you wouldn't want every Rasta in the neighborhood out on your front lawn." Charles rang up a sale and made change. He turned slyly to Whistle. "What would you do if you had the property and the Rude Boys said they wanted half?"

"Did I ask for property?"

"You was on *their* street!"

"What makes it theirs? Who says I don' have no rights?"

"You got rights. We ain't talking about rights."

"What we talkin' about?"

"We're talking property." Charles tried to make him see. He said it was right for people in a certain position to use the police. He said people like that didn't believe in taking the law into their own hands.

Whistle did his best to follow. He wanted to know what he could do to get his ticket ripped up, but Charles had his back to him. He was talking to a customer. "Ain't I got rights?" he asked. "Ain't I somebody?" The customer, a short evil woman who wanted Charles to cut her a small piece of cassava, scowled at him. It didn't bother Whistle. He looked right through her and kept on talking. "I come here I ain't got nothin'. What good's a man who ain't got nothin'? I take my life in my hands, drivin' out to where they burn down them houses. I'm a taximan!" It all ran together in his head, the lady on the porch of the big house, the way the policeman stuck the ticket under the windshield wiper and walked away. Maybe a man had to own his own house before he could fix his car in this country, but it wasn't right. They had to change that law. "I come with nothin'. I still don' have much. Only that livery business that I make from a broke down car. They want to take that from me? A man got his rights!"

"You talk too much," Charles said. He didn't look up because he had his big knife out and was measuring where he was going to cut the cassava. If he cut off too much, the second part would be no good. "You talk before you think. They got laws in this country."

"What laws? The laws is no good!" Whistle walked outside. He waved at the flies over the rotting mangoes and looked up and down the block at the stores with their shutdown fronts. They had gates and roll-down windows because there was crooks everywhere, and people remembered how it was years ago when the lights went out and they smashed the windows in the dark. Even Charles had a rickety gate, but he put it up so he wouldn't look suspicious. Nobody would break into his store. There was nothing to take. "What you lookin' at?" he asked the short woman who finally came out of the store. She made a face, blinking in the bright sun, then hissed at him. There was nobody on the sidewalk, not a car in sight. It made him mad, but he turned away. He had enough troubles.

"They take my license away," he told Charles a little bit later. "I got six tickets."

"You pay them?"

"I send away the money order, but they send it back. They say there ain't enough stamps."

"You got to pay the tickets, Whistle. All of them." Charles said it in his tired voice, shaking his head. "You pay it late, that's bad enough."

"I'll pay it, man. I'll send in the check." Charles nodded at him, looking sad. Whistle blinked, waiting for him to say it would be okay. He wanted Charles to say the police would understand. They would say he was a poor man, tired out because Tracy locked the door.

"Rest yourself first. That's what you got to do."

"You could see where they put in the hole. That door got more locks than wood!" Whistle's eyes burned. His head was heavy, the air thick. He wanted to go back, make Tracy see, but he knew Charles was right. "I come up the stairs and the key don't work. That's when I bang at the door, kick it till I hurts my foot. Tracy laughs and laughs."

"I know, man, I know."

"I don't know what's wrong with that woman."

"Tomorrow you pay the ticket, man, today you take a nap, a long nap." Charles said he should go in back and lay on the cot. They could talk later.

One day Tracy was fine, the next she was hexed. Whistle beat her like he should, and she didn't complain. She got a bloody mouth and spit in the sink. Shutting his eyes, he tried not to think of her. He tried to make his

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mind blank, stretching out on the cot, his head hurting. Tracy was behind the door. She was talking, but he couldn't understand her words. He pressed his ear up close, listening hard. There was more words, laughing, all of it jumbled up. He shut his eyes tight, hoping the words would stand still. Only they squirmed out of his mind, turning to noise. It was just like Tracy to laugh at him. He kicked the door with all his might, and a sharp pain shot up his leg. He shook it and woke up, staring at the cracked ceiling, hearing Charles jabber up front to a customer. His foot wasn't hurt, only asleep because of the way he was laying. It was all pins and needles, and his head was aching. Why didn't Charles shut up. The man's voice made him sick.

When the store was empty, Whistle came out of the back. "I got to get that ticket fixed," he said. "I got too many points." Charles showed him a weary face, and Whistle blew his nose. "Don't Tracy understand?" he asked. "The livery's what puts bread on the table."

"She don't like how you stay out late."

"A man gets drunk sometimes. He stays out late and come home sorry. Ain't no crime, Charles."

"You got to pay up, man. You got to promise you'll change."

"I'll pay them tickets! I got my pride."

"That white lady ever find out—"

"Find out? Find out what?"

"Find out you're scared. You're scared the white lady'll tell the police." Charles looked sly when he said it, but Whistle couldn't let it pass.

"I ain't scared! I'll go back to that street! I'll talk business to that lady!"

"So go up on her porch. Knock on her door!"

Charles was changing his tune. He was talking about what Whistle had to do to make people listen. Maybe Charles was bad in business, but he could say the states, all fifty. He could figure out what counted to people of property. "When we go?" Whistle asked.

"What's this *we*?"

"I can't do it without you, Charles. You be my lawyer."

Charles locked up the store. He didn't put up the gate because he didn't want customers to think he wasn't coming back, and he didn't make a sign because it would make people angry. "You have to think of the angles," he said. Sitting at the table in back and drinking warm ginger together, they talked about what they should say and how they should act. "Keep your temper, man," Charles warned. "Show that white lady you're somebody." Whistle nodded. "You say to her please, Missus, I want to just ask one question, and if she calls you names, you say please, I don't want no trouble. It's my rights we got to talk about."

Whistle listened hard. He watched Charles explain what he should say and what the lady should answer. It got all mixed up, and he complained he couldn't learn all the words. Charles said don't worry, he would be there to remind him. Also, it wasn't the *exact* words that mattered. Whistle just had to get the idea. "I'll take the lady's part," Charles said, talking in a high voice. "The ticket's written—it can't be destroyed!"

"Who says it can't?" Whistle asked, getting excited. "It's only a ticket!"

"No, man, that's wrong."

"What's wrong? I just ask a question."

Charles made his voice deep and careful. He said this was the way Whistle had to talk to a lady of property. "I'm a poor man," he said, "a family man. I can't afford the citation. I know it was wrong for me to fix my car on your nice street, but the ticket will hurt me. It will hurt my children."

Whistle promised to look down at his shoes when he talked. He swore he could make his voice soft.

"Don't whine," Charles said. "That will annoy the lady. Be natural, be yourself."

Whistle washed under his arms. He asked Charles for a shirt, and when he put it on, he saw it was stained at the collar. It didn't matter. The white shirt made him look like a proper man. He blinked at himself in the mirror and thanked his friend. Meanwhile, Charles took a long time getting dressed. He shined his black shoes and laid out his church suit. He dumped out a dresser drawer, searching everywhere for his new blue shirt. "This ain't no trial," Whistle said. "What you got to get dressed up for?"

"I'm your lawyer you said. I got to dress like a lawyer."

Whistle shrugged and looked at himself again in the mirror. He said the words about being a poor man, watching himself hold his head down. To be true, he didn't look natural. His neck looked stiff, his words sounded false. Only it was what Charles said, and even if Charles looked foolish in a suit, even if he was acting funny, not careful like always, it was what they had to do to get the ticket fixed.

When they parked the Mustang across from the white lady's house, they saw lots of cars out front, a new Buick, a shining Oldsmobile. Whistle looked away. His head hurt, and he had a bad taste in his mouth. Why were they here? How could he make himself get out from behind the wheel? "It's a party," he said to Charles. "We can't go there."

"Don't get cold feet, man. We got to talk to the lady."

Whistle rang the bell, and Charles stood behind him. The porch was big and old-fashioned, and the tall lady herself came to the door. "Yes?" she asked, her big smile going tight. Charles said later that Whistle didn't say a word, but he remembered starting to say his lines, looking down at her feet on the fancy rug. "What is it you want?" She acted like she didn't know who he was. She acted like she hadn't called the police that morning. It was too much to take, too much to swallow. All the soft words flew out of his head. He was an ugly black man to her. A nobody!

"You know me!" He said it loud and angry, looking her full in the face. "You know who I am!" The lady stepped back, her eyes wide. She tried to shut the door on them, but he wouldn't let her, dragging Charles with him when he charged into the hall. The white lady was scared to death, pushing the door against him, then letting go. It all happened fast, his yelling and stomping, the lady stumbled back, her hand over her mouth. There were people behind her, men in suits, women in summer dresses, the door to the street wide open. "You know me!" Whistle screamed.

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Charles was talking fast, trying to make excuses, but nobody was listening to him. The man with the little beard was hiding in back of the tall lady, peeking out from behind her shoulder. "It's for the ticket," Whistle said loud and clear. "I come for you to fix it." There was music from the other room, a crowd coming into the hall to watch. The tall lady's face turned sour. She was real mad at him now, squinting and frowning.

"Do you realize who you're speaking to?" asked the man with the beard. "Do you understand what you've done?"

"I got rights," Whistle said quietly. "I ain't comin' here to harrass you people. Only I got rights, same as everyone else."

"This is Judge Anna Garabaldi, and I must ask you not to take another step into this hallway. Simply leave."

Whistle turned to Charles, but his friend was useless, standing at the door like a servant. When a young man came out of the crowd and tried to take him by the elbow, he twisted away, backing, turning, letting all the words come. "You know me! You do! Don' talk like I ain't got no name. What do I care if she's some judge? I'm a man and I got my rights!" When he looked around, everybody was quiet and the lady judge wasn't there anymore. All his shouting was for nothing.

Later, sitting with Charles and going over what went wrong, he shook his head and asked why nobody answered him. "I gave you the words," Charles answered sadly.

Whistle couldn't see why his friend was so downhearted. Hadn't they talked to the people? Didn't they make a fuss? "It was rights talkin' to property," he said, but Charles only shook his head again. He went up front to take care of a customer, walking slow and stiff, all the fight out of him. Whistle put his head on the table. He needed his rest, he needed to make his headache stop. Tracy was waiting for him. She was tired of keeping herself locked up. When it got dark, he would go back to her, and she would press her face against his shoulder, saying he was her taximan, her own. She would make the bed for him and shush the children. She would let him be. Late in the morning, she would make him a big breakfast and he would tell her how he talked to the judge and Charles made a fool of himself. He would take her for a drive down the street where the trees made a tunnel and the big houses stood, looking shut up and empty on a summer afternoon.

It was past nine o'clock when Charles put up the gate. "Why you stay open till now?" Whistle asked. "It ain't worth it."

"My customers expect it."

"What customers, Charles? How many customers you got today?"

"I got steady customers. Today was slow."

Whistle kept his mouth shut. He sat in back while Charles heated up the chicken stew and they had a big bottle of Miller's. "Tomorrow I go back to that street," he said. "I change my tires around."

"You crazy, Whistle? Ain't you learned?"

"That street is wide. You can lay out and not worry about the traffic." Charles dumped the stew in two bowls and handed him one. They had hard bread with it, and for a while Whistle ate without talking, letting the bread soak, filling his mouth. He opened another big beer bottle and filled his glass so fast the suds spilled over, but he didn't mop it up. He waited for Charles to say he was a pig, to shake his head slow and say he was stupid. Only Charles didn't look up. He ate with his head down and sipped at his beer. "You think I'm wrong?" Whistle asked. "Say it!"

"That lady's a judge," Charles said. "They got your name."

"If I drive back and park on that lady's block, she can't make me move. If I sit up in my car all night, she can't say a word to me. I'm a free man. So are you! What're you afraid of?" Charles avoided his look. He drank his beer and looked into his empty glass. "What's wrong with you?" Whistle asked. "We ain't in West Kingston where they got the Gun Court Act and the police can lock you up anytime they wants to."

"You got to pay the ticket," Charles said, looking into his beer glass. "You got to pay them all."

It was always the same with Charles. He was scared of his shadow. When the bills came, he paid them. When the city said he had the extra tax for the store, he didn't call them up and say it was wrong. Not Charles. He talked big sometimes, but he followed every law. Only it wasn't the only way. It wasn't what a man had to do sometimes.

Driving back to the wide street, Whistle found the same spot he had parked in that morning. It was late, almost midnight, and nothing was moving up and down the block. He took a deep breath and got out. In the dark outside the street lights you could see the big houses lined up, looming, the moon like a ghost over them. He was careful when he shut the door and opened the trunk. He made no noise when he took out his tools and laid them out. Why did the white people stare at him? He had a complaint, and it was only right that the tall lady listen. It was only right that Tracy open the door, not stand behind it, her arms folded across her chest. He didn't smoke ganja or carry a Colt. He only got drunk some Saturday nights. What did she expect? What did anyone expect when a man worked twelve hours a day, driving from one end of the city to another?

After Whistle jacked up the car and took off a tire, he saw there was no whisper of tread left. He knelt in the gutter and turned the tire slow in the light. The rubber was smooth and dangerous, but his spare was worse. For a minute he sat still, sure somebody was out there watching. They wouldn't listen when a man talked about his rights. They would call security to hassle him instead. They would ring up the police and swear he was on their lawns.

Whistle stood in the gutter and looked up at the moon. He listened to the crickets and tried to see the stars behind the street lamp over him. Tracy said he was stubborn, and Charles said he was wrong. The police said it was against the law to lay down in the street and fix your own car. Only he wasn't ready to act like he was nobody. He wasn't ready to choke on their laws. He had work to do. Finding his flashlight, he slid under the front axle. There was a noise there he didn't like. □

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BARRY LOPEZ

THE IMAGE OF THE UNICORN

I am standing at the margin of the sea ice called the floe edge at the mouth of Admiralty Inlet, northern Baffin Island, three or four miles out to sea. The firmness beneath my feet belies the ordinary sense of the phrase "out to sea." Several Eskimo camps stand here along the white and black edge of ice and water. All of us have come from another place—Nuvua, 30 miles to the south at the tip of Uluksan Peninsula. We are here to hunt narwhals. They are out there in the open water of Lancaster Sound somewhere, waiting for this last ice barrier to break up so they can enter their summer feeding grounds in Admiralty Inlet.

As I walk along the floe edge—the light is brilliant, the ceaseless light of July; but after so many weeks I am weary of it; I stare at the few shadows on the ice with a kind of hunger—as I walk along here I am aware of both fear and elation, a mix that comes in remote regions with the realization that you are exposed and the weather can be capricious, and fatal. The wind is light and from the north—I can see its corrugation on the surface of the water. Should it swing around and come from the south, the ice behind us would begin to open up. Traverse cracks across the inlet, only a few inches wide yesterday, would begin to widen. We would have difficulty getting back to Nuvua, even if we left at the first sign of a wind shift.

A few days ago one of these men was caught like that. A distant explosion, like dynamite, told him what a compass bearing he quickly took on Borden Peninsula confirmed—that the five-square-mile sheet of floe ice he had camped on was being swept out of Admiralty Inlet toward open water in Lancaster Sound. He and his companion, knowing the set of local currents, struck out immediately to the east. Twelve hours later, near exhaustion, they came to a place where the ice floe was grounded in shallow coastal water, making a huge, slow turn in the current before breaking loose into Lancaster Sound. They leaped and plunged across broken ice cakes for the firm shore.

I am not so much thinking of these things, however, as I am feeling the exuberance of birds around me. Black-legged kittiwakes, northern fulmars, and black guillemots are wheeling and hovering in weightless acrobatics over the streams and lenses of life in the water—zoöplankton and arctic cod—into which they plunge repeatedly for their sustenance. Out on the ice, at piles of offal from the narwhal hunt, glaucous and Thayer's gulls stake a rough-tempered claim to some piece of flesh, brash, shouldering birds alongside the more reticent and rarer ivory gulls.

Birds fly across these waters in numbers that encourage you to simply flip your pencil in the air. Certain species end their northward migration here and nest. Others fly on to Devon and Ellesmere islands or to northwest Greenland. From where I now stand I can study some that stay, nesting in an unbroken line for 10 miles on a cliff between Baillarge Bay and Elwin Inlet, a rugged wall of sedimentary and volcanic rock pocked with indentations and ledges, rising at an angle of 80° from the water. More than 50,000 northern fulmars. At other such rookeries around Lancaster Sound, guillemots, murres, and kittiwakes congregate in tens and even hundreds of thousands to nest and feed during the short summer. Gulls, arctic terns, snow geese, eiders, red-breasted mergansers, and dovekies have passed through in droves already. Of the dovekies—a small, stocky seabird with a black head and bright white underside—something on the order of a third of the northwest Greenland population of 30 *million* passes over Lancaster Sound in May and June.

On the white-as-eggshell ice plain where we are camped, with the mottled browns and ochers of Borden Peninsula to the east and the dark cliffs of Brodeur Peninsula obscured in haze to the west, the adroit movements of the birds above the water give the landscape an immediate, vivid dimension: the eye, drawn far out to pale hues on the horizon, comes back smartly to the black water, where, *plunk*, a guillemot disappears in a dive.

The outcry of birds, the bullet-whirr of their passing wings, the splashing of water, is, like the falling light, unending. Lancaster Sound is a rare arctic marine sanctuary, a place where creatures are concentrated in the sort of densities one finds in the Antarctic Ocean, the richest sea waters in the world. Marine ecologists are not certain why Lancaster Sound teems so with life, but local upwelling currents and a supply of nutrients from glacial runoff on Devon Island seem critical.*

*Lancaster Sound has been proposed as a world biological reserve by the International Biological Programme and singled out by the United Nations as a Natural Site of World Heritage Quality. The stability of this ecosystem is currently threatened by offshore oil development and increased shipping traffic. David Nettleship, an arctic ornithologist with preëminent experience here, has written that such economic development "should be strictly controlled in order to prevent the destruction of a uniquely rich high arctic oasis. To harm it would go far towards making a desert of arctic waters."

Excerpted from the book *Arctic Dreams*, by Barry Lopez.
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Three million colonial seabirds, mostly northern fulmars, kittiwakes, and guillemots, nest and feed here in the summer. It is no longer the haunt of 10,000 or so bowhead whales, but it remains a summering ground for more than 30 percent of the belukha whale population of North America, and more than three-quarters of the world's population of narwhals. No one is sure how many harp, bearded, and ringed seals are here—probably more than a quarter of a million. In addition there are thousands of Atlantic walrus. The coastal regions are a denning area for polar bear and home to thousands of arctic fox in the summer.

I am concerned, as I walk, however, more with what is immediate to my senses—the ternlike whiffle and spin of birds over the water, the chicken-cackling of northern fulmars, and cool air full of the breath of sea life. This community of creatures, including all those invisible in the water, constitutes a unique overlap of land, water, and air. This is a special meeting ground, like that of a forest's edge with a clearing; or where the fresh waters of an estuary meet the saline tides of the sea; or at a river's riparian edge. The mingling of animals from different ecosystems charges such border zones with evolutionary potential. Flying creatures here at Admiralty Inlet walk on ice. They break the pane of water with their dives to feed. Marine mammals break the pane of water coming the other way to breathe.

The edges of any landscape—horizons, the lip of a valley, the bend of a river around a canyon wall—quicken an observer's expectations. That attraction to borders, to the earth's twilit places, is part of the shape of human curiosity. And the edges that cause excitement are like these where I now walk, sensing the birds toying with gravity; or like those in quantum mechanics, where what is critical straddles a border between being a wave and being a particle, between being what it is and becoming something else, occupying an edge of time that defeats our geometries. In biology these transitional areas between two different communities are called ecotones.

The ecotone at the Admiralty Inlet floe edge extends in two planes. In order to pass under the ice from the open sea, an animal must be free of a need for atmospheric oxygen; the floe edge, therefore, is a barrier to the horizontal migration of whales. In the vertical plane, no bird can penetrate the ice and birds like gulls can't go below water with guillemots to feed on schools of fish. Sunlight, too, is halted at these borders.

To stand at the edge of this four-foot-thick ice platform, however, is to find yourself in a rich biological crease. Species of alga grow on the bottom of the sea ice, turning it golden brown with a patchwork of life. These tiny diatoms feed zoöplankton moving through the upper layers of water in vast clouds—underwater galaxies of copepods, amphipods, and mysids. These in turn feed the streaming schools of cod. The cod feed the birds. And the narwhals. And also the ringed seal, which feeds the polar bear, and eventually the fox. The algae at the bottom of this food web are called "epontic" algae, the algae of the sea ice. (Ringed seals, ivory gulls, and other birds and mammals whose lives are ice-oriented are called "pagophylic.") It is the ice, however, that holds this life together. For ice-associated seals, vulnerable on a beach, it is a place offshore to rest, directly over their feeding grounds. It provides algae with a surface to grow on. It shelters arctic cod from hunting seabirds and herds of narwhals, and it shelters the narwhal from the predatory orca. It is the bear's highway over the sea. And it gives me a place to stand on the ocean, and wonder.

I walk here intent on the birds, half aware of the biological mysteries in these placid, depthless waters in which I catch fleeting silver glimpses of cod. I feel blessed. I draw in the salt air and feel the warmth of sunlight on my face. I recall a childhood of summer days on the beaches of California. I feel the wealth to be had in life in an aimless walk like this, through woods or over a prairie or down a beach.

It is not all benign and ethereal at the ice edge, however. You cannot—I cannot—lose completely the sense of how far from land this is. And I am wary of walrus. A male walrus is a huge animal, approaching the size of a small car. At close range in the water its agility and speed are intimidating. Walruses normally eat only bottom-dwelling organisms like clams, worms, and crabs, but there is an unusual sort of walrus—almost always a male, a loner, that deliberately hunts and kills seals. Its ivory tusks are crosshatched with the claw marks of seals fighting for their lives. (It is called *angeyeghaq* by the Eskimos on Saint Lawrence Island, who are familiar with its unusual behavior.) This rare carnivore will charge off an ice floe to attack a small boat, and actively pursue and try to kill people in the water. A friend of mine was once standing with an Eskimo friend at an ice edge when the man cautioned him to step back. They retreated 15 or 20 feet. Less than a minute later a walrus surfaced in an explosion of water where they had been standing. A polar bear trick.

When I walk along the floe edge I think of that story. I have no ear educated as was his companion's to anticipate the arrival of the walrus. A native ear. Experience. I walk here susceptible as any traveler to the unknown.

I stood still occasionally to listen. I heard only the claver of birds. Then there was something else. I had never heard the sound before, but when it came, plosive and gurgling, I knew instinctively what it was, even as everyone in camp jumped. I strained to see them, to spot the vapor of their breath, a warm mist against the soft horizon, or the white tip of a tusk breaking the surface of the water, a dark pattern that retained its shape against the dark, shifting patterns of the water. Somewhere out there in the ice fragments. Gone. Gone now. Others had heard the breathing. Human figures in a camp off to the west, dark lines on the blinding white ice, gesture toward us with upraised arms.

The first narwhals I ever saw lived far from here, in Bering Strait. The day I saw them I knew that no element of the earth's natural history had ever before brought me so far, so suddenly. It was as though something from a bestiary had taken shape, a creature strange as a giraffe. It was as if the testimony of someone I had no reason to doubt, yet could not quite believe, a story too farfetched, had been verified at a glance.

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I was with a bowhead whale biologist named Don Ljungblad, flying search transects over Bering Sea. It was May, and the first bowheads of spring were slowly working their way north through Bering Strait toward their summer feeding grounds in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. Each day as we flew these transects we would pass over belukha whale and walrus, ringed, spotted, and ribbon seals, bearded seals, and flocks of birds migrating to Siberia. I know of no other region in North America where animals can be met with in such numbers. Bering Sea itself is probably the richest of all the northern seas, as rich as Chesapeake Bay or the Grand Banks at the time of their discovery. Its bounty of crabs, pollock, cod, sole, herring, clams, and salmon is set down in wild numbers, the rambling digits of guesswork. The numbers of birds and marine mammals feeding here, to a person familiar with anything but the Serengeti or life at the Antarctic convergence, are magical. At the height of migration in the spring, the testament of life in Bering Sea is absolutely stilling in its dimensions.

The two weeks I spent flying with Ljungblad, with so many thousands of creatures moving through the water and the air, were a heady experience. Herds of belukha whale glided in silent shoals beneath transparent sheets of young ice. Squadrons of fast-flying sea ducks flashed beneath us as they banked away. We passed ice floes stained red in a hundred places with the afterbirths of walrus. Staring all day into the bright light reflected from the ice and water, however, and the compression in time of these extraordinary events, left me dazed some evenings.

Aspects of the arctic landscape that had become salient for me—its real and temporal borders; a rare, rich oasis of life surrounded by vast stretches of deserted land; the upending of conventional kinds of time; biological vulnerability made poignant by the forgiving light of summer—all of this was evoked over Bering Sea.

The day we saw the narwhals we were flying south, low over Bering Strait. The ice in Chukchi Sea behind us was so close it did not seem possible that bowheads could have penetrated this far; but it is good to check, because they can make headway in ice as heavy as this and they are able to come a long way north undetected in lighter ice on the Russian side. I was daydreaming about two bowheads we had seen that morning. They had been floating side by side in a broad lane of unusually clear water between a shelf of shorefast ice and the pack ice—the flaw lead. As we passed over, they made a single movement together, a slow, rolling turn and graceful glide, like figure skaters pushing off, these 50-ton leviathans. Ljungblad shouted in my earphones: "Waiting." They were waiting for the ice in the strait to open up. Ljungblad saw nearly 300 bowheads waiting calmly like this one year, some on their backs, some with their chins resting on the ice.

The narwhals appeared in the middle of this reverie. Two males, with ivory tusks spiraling out of their foreheads, the image of the unicorn with which history has confused them. They were close to the same size and light-colored, and were lying parallel and motionless in a long, straight lead in the ice. My eye was drawn to them before my conscious mind, let alone my voice, could catch up. I stared dumbfounded while someone else shouted. Not just to see the narwhals, but *here*, a few miles northwest of King Island in Bering Sea. In all the years scientists have kept records for these waters, no one had ever seen a narwhal alive in Bering Sea. Judging from the heaviness of the ice around them, they must have spent the winter here.* They were either residents, a wondrous thought, or they had come from the nearest population centers the previous fall, from waters north of Siberia or from northeastern Canada.

The appearance of these animals was highly provocative. We made circle after circle above them, until they swam away under the ice and were gone. Then we looked at each other. Who could say what this was, really?

Because you have seen something doesn't mean you can explain it. Differing interpretations will always abound, even when good minds come to bear. The kernel of indisputable information is a dot in space; interpretations grow out of the desire to make this point a line, to give it a direction. The directions in which it can be sent, the uses to which it can be put by a culturally, professionally, and geographically diverse society, are almost without limit. The possibilities make good scientists chary. In a region like the Arctic, tense with a hunger for wealth, with fears of plunder, interpretation can quickly get beyond a scientist's control. When asked to assess the meaning of a biological event—What were those animals doing out there? Where do they belong?—they hedge. They are sometimes reluctant to elaborate on what they saw, because they cannot say what it means, and they are suspicious of those who say they know. Some even distrust the motives behind the questions.

I think along these lines in this instance because of the animal. No large mammal in the Northern Hemisphere comes as close as the narwhal to having its very existence doubted. For some, the possibility that this creature might actually live in the threatened waters of Bering Sea is portentous, a significant apparition on the eve of an era of disruptive oil exploration there. For others, those with the leases to search for oil and gas in Navarin and Norton basins, the possibility that narwhals may live there is a complicating environmental nuisance. Hardly anyone marvels solely at the fact that on the afternoon of April 16, 1982, five people saw two narwhals in a place so unexpected that they were flabbergasted. They remained speechless, circling over the animals in a state of wonder. In those moments the animals did not have to mean anything at all.

We know more about the rings of Saturn than we know about the narwhal. Where do they go and what do they eat in the winter, when it is too dark and cold for us to find them? The Chilean poet and essayist Pablo Neruda wonders in his memoirs how an animal this large can have remained so obscure and uncelebrated. Its name, he thought, was "the most beautiful of undersea names, the

*The narwhal is not nearly as forceful in the ice as the bowhead. It can break through only about 6 inches of ice with its head. A bowhead, using its brow or on occasion its more formidable chin, can break through as much as 18 inches of sea ice.

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name of a sea chalice that sings, the name of a crystal spur." Why, he wondered, had no one taken Narwhal for a last name, or built "a beautiful Narwhal Building?"

Part of the answer lies with a regrettable connotation of death in the animal's name. The pallid color of the narwhal's skin has been likened to that of a drowned human corpse, and it is widely thought that its name came from the Old Norse for "corpse" and "whale," *nár* + *hvalr*. A medieval belief that the narwhal's flesh was poisonous has been offered in support of this interpretation, as well as the belief that its "horn" was proof at that time against being poisoned. The eighteenth-century naturalist Buffon characterized the animal for all the generations that would read him as one that "revels in carnage, attacks without provocation, and kills without need." Among its associations with human enterprise in the inhospitable north is the following grim incident. In 1126, Arnhald, first bishop of Iceland, was shipwrecked off the Icelandic coast. Drowned men and part of the contents of the ship's hold washed up in a marsh, a place afterward called the Pool of Corpses. Conspicuous among the items of salvage were a number of narwhal tusks, "with runic letters upon them in an indelible red gum so that each sailor might know his own at the end of the voyage."

W.P. Lehmann, a professor of Germanic languages, believes the association with death is a linguistic accident. The Old Norse *nárhvalr* (whence the English *narwhal*, the French *narval*, the German *Narwal*, etc.), he says, was a vernacular play on the word *nahvalr*—the way *high-bred corn* is used in place of *hybrid corn*, or *sparrowgrass* is used for *asparagus*. According to Lehmann, *nahvalr* is an earlier, West Norse term meaning a "whale distinguished by a long, narrow projection" (the tusk).

Some, nevertheless, still call the narwhal "the corpse whale," and the unfounded belief that it is a cause of human death, or an omen or symbol to be associated with human death, remains intact to this day in some quarters. Animals are often fixed like this in history, bearing an unwarranted association derived from notions or surmise having no connection at all with their real life. The fuller explanations of modern field biology are an antidote, in part, to this tendency to name an animal carelessly. But it is also, as Neruda suggests, a task of literature to take animals regularly from the shelves where we have stored them, like charms or the most intricate of watches, and to bring them to life.

The obscurity of narwhals is not easily breeched by science. To begin with, they live underwater. And they live year-round in the polar ice, where the logistics and expense involved in approaching them are formidable barriers to field research, even in summer. Scientists have largely been limited to watching what takes place at the surface of the water in the open sea adjacent to observation points high on coastal bluffs. And to putting hydrophones in the water with them, and to making comparisons with the belukha whale, a close and better-known relative. About the regular periodic events of their lives, such as migration, breeding, and calving, in relation to climatic changes and fluctuations in the size of the population, we know next to nothing.*

Scientists can speak with precision only about the physical animal, not the ecology or behavior of this social and gregarious small whale. (It is the latter, not the former, unfortunately, that is most crucial to an understanding of how industrial development might affect narwhals.) Adult males, 16 feet long and weighing upwards of 3300 pounds, are about a quarter again as large as adult females. Males are also distinguished by an ivory tusk that pierces the upper lip on the left side and extends forward as much as 10 feet. Rarely, a female is found with a tusk, and, more rarely still, males and females with tusks on both sides of the upper jaw.

From the side, compared with the rest of its body, the narwhal's head seems small and blunt. It is dominated by a high, rounded forehead filled with bioacoustical lipids—special fats that allow the narwhal to use sound waves to communicate with other whales and to locate itself and other objects in its three-dimensional world. Its short front flippers function as little more than diving planes. The cone-shaped body tapers from just behind these flippers—where its girth is greatest, as much as eight feet—to a vertical ellipse at the tail. In place of a dorsal fin, a low dorsal ridge about five feet long extends in an irregular crenulation down the back. The tail flukes are unique. Seen from above, they appear heart-shaped, like a ginkgo leaf, with a deep-notched center and trailing edges that curve far forward.

Viewed from the front, the head seems somewhat squarish and asymmetrical, and oddly small against the deep chest. The mouth, too, seems small for such a large animal, with the upper lip just covering the edge of a short, wedge-shaped jaw. The eyes are located just above and behind the upturned corners of the mouth, which give the animal a bemused expression. (The evolutionary loss of facial muscles, naturalist Peter Warshall has noted, means no quizzical wrinkling of the forehead, no raised eyebrow of disbelief, no pursed lip of determination.) A single, crescent-shaped blowhole on top of the head is in a transverse line with the eyes.

Narwhal calves are almost uniformly gray. Young adults show spreading patches and streaks of white on the belly and marbling on the flanks. Adults are dark gray across the top of the head and down the back. Lighter grays predominate on top of the flippers and flukes, whites and light yellow-whites underneath. The back and flanks are marbled with blackish grays. Older animals, especially males, may be almost entirely white. Females, say some, are always lighter-colored on their flanks.

The marbled quality of the skin, which feels like smooth, oiled stone, is mesmerizing. On the flukes especially, where curvilinear streaks of dark gray overlap whitish-gray tones, the effect could not be more painterly. Elsewhere on the body, spots dominate. "These

*The knowledge and insight of Eskimos on these points, unfortunately, are of little help. Of all the areas of natural history in which they show expertise, native hunters are weakest in their understanding of the population dynamics of migratory animals. The reason is straightforward. Too much of the animal's life is lived "outside the community," beyond the geographic and phenomenological landscape the Eskimos share with them.

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spots," writes William Scoresby, "are of a roundish or oblong form: on the back, where they seldom exceed two inches in diameter, they are the darkest and most crowded together, yet with intervals of pure white among them. On the side the spots are fainter, smaller, and more open. On the belly, they become extremely faint and few, and in considerable surfaces are not to be seen." These patterns completely penetrate the skin, which is a half-inch thick.

In the water, depending on sunlight and the color of the water itself, narwhals, according to British whaling historian Basil Lubbock, take on "many hues, from deep sea green to even an intense lake [blue] colour."

Narwhals are strong swimmers, with the ability to alter the contours of their body very slightly to reduce turbulence. Their speed and maneuverability are sufficient to hunt down swift prey—arctic cod, Greenland halibut, redfish—and to avoid their enemies, the orca and the Greenland shark.

Narwhals live in close association with ice margins and are sometimes found far inside heavy pack ice, miles from open water. (How they determine whether the lead systems they follow into the ice will stay open behind them, ensuring their safe return, is not known.) They manage to survive in areas of strong currents and wind where the movement of ice on the surface is violent and where leads open and close, or freeze over, very quickly. (Like seabirds, they seem to have an uncanny sense of when a particular lead is going to close in on them, and they leave.) That they are not infallible in anticipating the movement and formation of ice, which seals them off from the open air and oxygen, is attested to by a relatively unusual and often fatal event called a savssat.

Savssats are most commonly observed on the west coast of Greenland. Late in the fall, while narwhals are still feeding deep in a coastal fiord, a band of ice may form in calm water across the fiord's mouth. The ice sheet may then expand toward the head of the fiord. At some point the distance from its landward to its seaward edge exceeds the distance a narwhal can travel on a single breath. By this time, too, shorefast ice may have formed at the head of the fiord, and it may grow out to meet the sea ice. The narwhals are thus crowded into a smaller and smaller patch of open water. Their bellowing and gurgling, their bovinelike moans and the plosive screech of their breathing, can sometimes be heard at a great distance.

The Danish scientist Christian Vibe visited a savssat on March 16, 1943, on the west coast of central Greenland. Hundreds of narwhals and belukhas were trapped in an opening less than 20 feet square. The black surface of the water was utterly "calm and still," writes Vibe. "Then the smooth surface was suddenly broken by black shadows and white animals which in elegant curves came up and disappeared—narwhals and white whales by the score. Side by side they emerged so close to each other that some of them would be lifted on the backs of the others and turn a somersault with the handsome tail waving in the air. First rows of narwhal, then white whales and then again narwhals—each species separately. It seethed, bobbed, and splashed in the opening. With a hollow, whistling sound they inhaled the air as if sucking it in through long iron tubes. The water was greatly disturbed . . . and the waves washed far in over the ice." The splashed water froze to the rim of the breathing hole, as did the moisture from their exhalations, further reducing the size of the savssat. In spite of the frenzy, not a single animal that Vibe saw was wounded by the huge tusks of the narwhal.*

The narwhal is classed in the suborder Odontoceti, with toothed whales such as the sperm whale, in the superfamily Delphinoidea, along with porpoises and dolphins, and in the family Monodontidae with a single companion, the belukha. In contrast to the apparently coastally-adapted belukha, biologists believe the narwhal is a pelagic or open-ocean species, that it is more ice-adapted, and that it winters farther to the north. Extrapolating on the basis of what is known of the belukha, it is thought that narwhals breed in April and give birth to a single, five-foot, 170-pound calf about fourteen months later, in June or July. Calves carry an inch-thick layer of blubber at birth to protect them against the cold water. They appear to nurse for about two years and may stay with their mothers for three years, or more. Extrapolating once again from the belukha, it is thought that females reach sexual maturity between four and seven years of age, males between eight and nine years.

Narwhals are usually seen in small groups of two to eight animals, frequently of the same sex and age. In the summer, female groups, which include calves, are sometimes smaller or more loosely knit than male groups. During spring migration, herds may consist of 300 or more animals.

Narwhals feed largely on arctic and polar cod, Greenland halibut, redfish, sculpins, and other fish, on squid and to some extent on shrimps of several kinds, and on octopus and crustaceans. They have a complex, five-chambered stomach that processes food quickly, leaving undigested the chitinous beaks of squid and octopus, the carapaces of crustaceans, and the ear bones and eye lenses of fish, from which biologists can piece together knowledge of their diets.

Two types of "whale lice" (actually minute crustaceans) cling to their skin, in the cavity where the tusk passes through the lip, in the tail notch in the flukes, and in wounds (all places where they are least likely to be swept off by the flow of water past the narwhal's body). The tracks of the sharp, hooked legs of these tiny creatures are sometimes very clear on a narwhal's skin. Older animals may carry such infestations of these parasites as to cause an observer to wince.

If you were to stand at the edge of a sea cliff on the north coast of Borden Peninsula, Baffin Island, you could watch narwhals migrating past more or less continuously for

*Eskimo hunters killed 340 narwhals and belukhas at this savssat in a week, before the ice fractured and the rest escaped. In the spring of 1915, Eskimos at Disko Bay took more than a thousand narwhals and belukhas at two savssats over a period of several months. Inattentive birds, especially thick-billed murres and dovekies which require a lot of open water to take off, may also suddenly find themselves with insufficient room and may be trapped.

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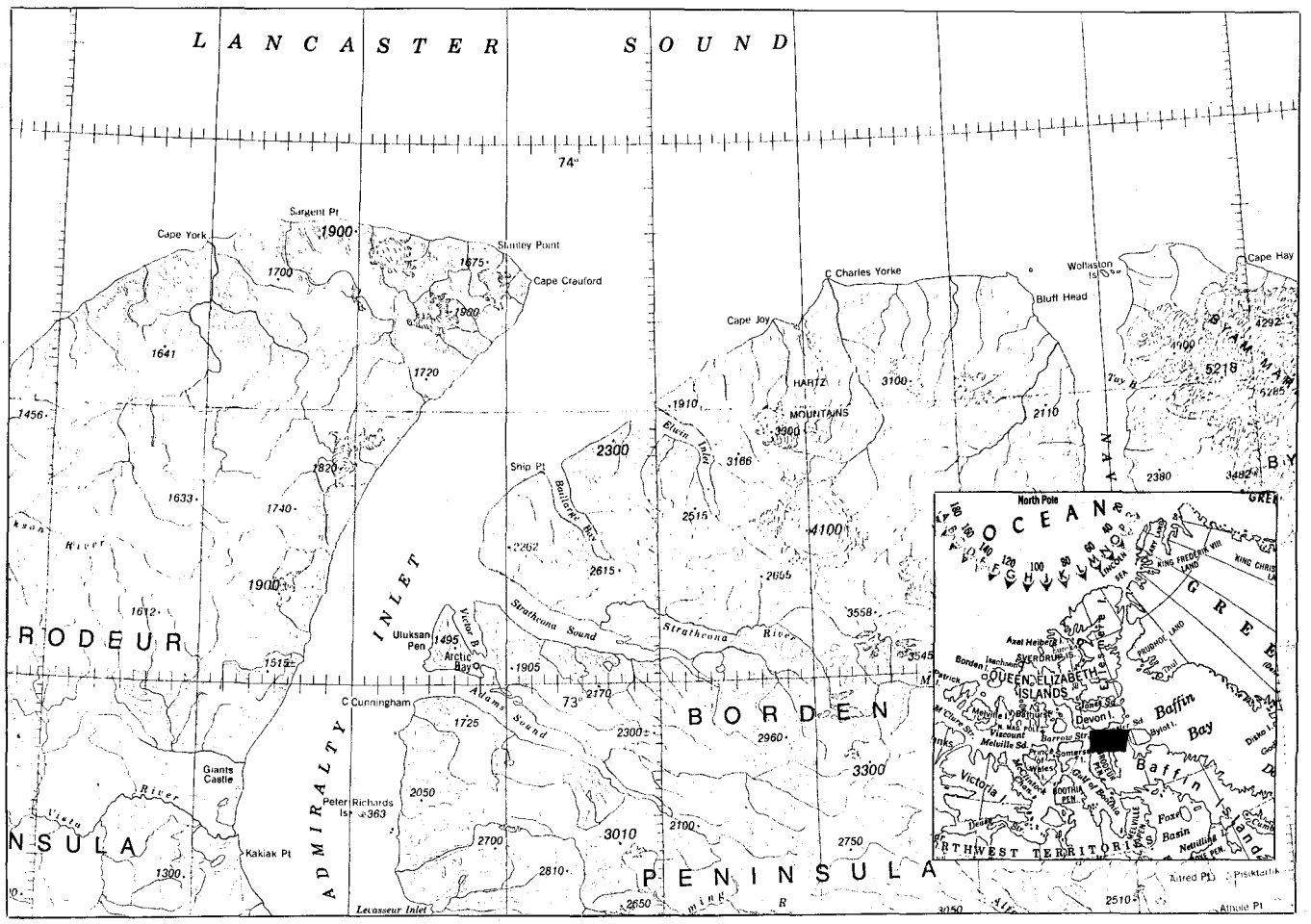
several weeks in the twenty-four-hour light of June. You would be struck by their agility and swiftness, by the synchronicity of their movements as they swam and dived in unison, and by a quality of alert composure in them, of capability in the face of whatever might happen. Their attractiveness lies partly with their strong, graceful movements in three dimensions, like gliding birds on an airless day. An impressive form of their synchronous behavior is their ability to deep-dive in groups. They disappear as a single diminishing shape, gray fading to darkness. They reach depths of 1000 feet or more, and their intent, often, is then to drive schools of polar cod toward the surface at such a rate that the fish lose consciousness from the too-rapid expansion of their swim bladders. At the surface, thousands of these stunned fish feed narwhals and harp seals, and rafts of excited northern fulmars and kittiwakes.

Watching from high above, one is also struck by the social interactions of narwhals, which are extensive and appear to be well organized according to hierarchies of age and sex. The socializing of males frequently involves the use of their tusks. They cross them like swords above the water, or one forces another down by pressing his tusk across the other's back, or they face each other head-on, their tusks side by side.

Helen Silverman, whose graduate work included a study of the social organization and behavior of narwhals, describes as typical the following scene, from her observations in Lancaster Sound. "On one occasion a group of five narwhals consisting of two adult males, one adult female, one [calf] and one juvenile were moving west with the males in the lead. The group stopped and remained on the surface for about 30 [seconds]. One male turned, moved under the [calf], and lifted it out of the water twice. There was no apparent reaction from the mother. The male then touched the side of the female with the tip of its tusk and the group continued westward."

Sitting high on a sea cliff in sunny, blustery weather in late June—the familiar sense of expansiveness, of deep exhilaration such weather brings over one, combined with the opportunity to watch animals, is summed up in a single Eskimo word: *quviannikumut*, "to feel deeply happy"—sitting here like this, it is easy to fall into speculation about the obscure narwhal. From the time I first looked into a narwhal's mouth, past the accordion pleats of its tongue, at the soft white interior splashed with Tyrian purple, I have thought of their affinity with sperm whales, whose mouths are similarly colored. Like the sperm whale, the narwhal is a deep diver. No other whales but the narwhal and the sperm whale are known to sleep on the surface for hours at a time. And when the narwhal lies at the surface, it lies like a sperm whale, with the section of its back from blowhole to dorsal ridge exposed, and the rest of its back and tail hanging down in the water. Like the sperm whale, it is renowned for its teeth; and it has been pursued, though briefly, for the fine oils in its forehead.



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Like all whales, the narwhal's evolutionary roots are in the Cretaceous, with insect-eating carnivores that we, too, are descendant from. Its line of development through the Cretaceous and into the Paleocene follows that of artiodactyls like the hippopotamus and the antelope—and then it takes a radical turn. After some 330 million years on dry land, since it emerged from the sea during the Devonian period 380 million years ago, the line of genetic development that will produce whales returns to the world's oceans. The first proto-whales turn up in the Eocene, 45 million years ago, the first toothed whales 18 million years later, in the Oligocene. By then, the extraordinary adjustments that had to take place to permit air-breathing mammals to live in the sea were largely complete.

Looking down from the sea cliffs at a lone whale floating peacefully in the blue-green water, it is possible to meditate on these evolutionary changes in the mammalian line, to imagine this creature brought forward in time to this moment. What were once its rear legs have disappeared, though the skeleton still shows the trace of a pelvis. Sea water gave it such buoyancy that it required little in the way of a skeletal structure; it therefore has achieved a large size without loss of agility. It left behind it a world of oscillating temperatures (temperatures on the arctic headland from which I gaze may span a range of 120°F over twelve months) for a world where the temperature barely fluctuates. It did not relinquish its warm-blooded way of life, however; it is insulated against the cold with a layer of blubber two to four inches thick.

The two greatest changes in its body have been in the way it now stores and uses oxygen, and in a rearrangement of its senses to suit a world that is largely acoustical, not visual or olfactory, in its stimulations.

When I breathe this arctic air, 34 percent of the oxygen is briefly stored in my lungs, 41 percent in my blood, 13 percent in my muscles, and 12 percent in the tissues of other of my organs. I take a deep breath only when I am winded or in a state of emotion; the narwhal always takes a deep breath—its draft of this same air fills its small lungs completely. And it stores the oxygen differently, so it can draw on it steadily during a fifteen-minute dive. Only about 9 percent stays in its lungs, while 41 percent goes into the blood, another 41 percent into the muscles, and about 9 percent into other tissues. The oxygen is bound to hemoglobin molecules in its blood (no different from my own), and to myoglobin molecules in its muscles. (The high proportion of myoglobin in its muscles makes the narwhal's muscle meat dark maroon, like the flesh of all marine mammals.)

Changes in the narwhal's circulatory system—the evolution of *rete mirabile*, "wonder nets" of blood vessels; an enlargement of its hepatic veins; a reversible flow of blood at certain places—have allowed it to adapt comfortably to the great pressures it experiences during deep dives.

There is too little nitrogen in its blood for "the bends" to occur when it surfaces. Carbon dioxide, the by-product of respiration, is effectively stored until it can be explosively expelled with a rapid flushing of the lungs.

It is only with an elaborate apparatus of scuba gear, decompression tanks, wet suits, weight belts, and swim fins that we can explore these changes. Even then it is hard to appreciate the radical alteration of mammalian development that the narwhal represents. First, ours is largely a two-dimensional world. We are not creatures who look up often. We are used to exploring "the length and breadth" of issues, not their "height." For the narwhal there are very few two-dimensional experiences—the sense of the water it feels at the surface of its skin, and that plane it must break in order to breathe.

The second constraint on our appreciation of the narwhal's world is that it "knows" according to a different hierarchy of senses than the one we are accustomed to. Its chemical senses of taste and smell are all but gone, as far as we know, though narwhals probably retain an ability to determine salinity. Its tactile sense remains acute. Its sensitivity to pressure is elevated—it has a highly discriminating feeling for depth and a hunter's sensitivity to the slight turbulence created by a school of cod cruising ahead of it in its dimly lit world. The sense of sight is atrophied, because of a lack of light. The eye, in fact, has changed in order to accommodate itself to high pressures, the chemical irritation of salt, a constant rush of water past it, and the different angle of refraction of light underwater. (The narwhal sees the world above water with an eye that does not move in its socket, with astigmatic vision and a limited ability to change the distance at which it can focus.)

How different must be "the world" for such a creature, for whom sight is but a peripheral sense, who occupies, instead, a three-dimensional acoustical space. Perhaps only musicians have some inkling of the formal shape of emotions and motivation that might define such a sensibility.

The Arctic Ocean can seem utterly silent on a summer day to an observer standing far above. If you lowered a hydrophone, however, you would discover a sphere of "noise" that only spectrum analyzers and tape recorders could unravel. The tremolo moans of bearded seals. The electric crackling of shrimp. The baritone boom of walrus. The high-pitched bark and yelp of ringed seals. The clicks, pure tones, birdlike trills, and harmonics of belukhas and narwhals. The elephantine trumpeting of bowhead whales. Added to these animal noises would be the sounds of shifting sediments on the sea floor, the whine and fracture of sea ice, and the sound of deep-keeled ice grounding in shallow water.

The narwhal is not only at home in this "cacophony," as possessed of the sense of a neighborhood as we might conceivably be on an evening stroll, but it manages to appear "asleep," oblivious at the surface of the water on a summer day in Lancaster Sound.

The single most important change that took place in the whale's acoustical system to permit it to live in this world was the isolation of its auditory canals from each other. It could then receive waterborne sound independently on each side of its head and so determine the direction from which a sound was coming. (We can do this only in the open air; underwater, sound vibrates evenly through the bones of our head.) The narwhal, of course, receives many sounds; we can only speculate about what it pays attention to, or what information it may obtain

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from all that it hears. Conversely, narwhals also emit many sounds important, presumably, to narwhals and to other animals too.

Acoustical scientists divide narwhal sound into two categories. Respiratory sounds are audible to us as wheezes, moans, whistles, and gurgles of various sorts. The second group of sounds, those associated with, presumably, echolocation and communication, scientists divide into three categories: clicking, generated at rates as high as 500 clicks per second; pulsed tones; and pure tones. (Certain of these sounds are audible to someone in a boat in the open air, like an effervescence rising from the surface of the water.)

Narwhals, it is believed, use clicking sounds to locate themselves, their companions, their prey, and such things as floe edges and the trend of leads. Pulsed tones are thought to be social in nature and susceptible to individual modification, so each narwhal has a "signature" tone or call of its own. Pure-tone signals, too, are thought to be social or communicative in function. According to several scientists writing in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, the narwhal "seems much less noisy [than the belukha], appears to have a smaller variety of sounds, and produces many that are outside the limits of human hearing." A later study, however, found narwhals "extremely loquacious underwater," and noted that tape recordings were "almost saturated with acoustic signals of highly variable duration and frequency composition." The same study concluded, too, that much of the narwhal's acoustically related behavior "remains a matter of conjecture."

I dwell on all this because of a routine presumption—that the whale's ability to receive and generate sound indicates it is an "intelligent" creature—and an opposite presumption, evident in a Canadian government report, that the continuous racket of a subsea drilling operation, with the attendant din of ship and air traffic operations, "would not be expected to be a hazard [to narwhals] because of . . . the assumed high levels of ambient underwater noise in Lancaster Sound."

It is hard to believe in an imagination so narrow in its scope, so callous toward life, that it could write these last words. Cetaceans may well be less "intelligent," less defined by will, imagination, and forms of logic, than we are. But the *idea* that they are intelligent, and that they would be affected by such man-made noise, is not so much presumption as an expression of a possibility, the taking of a respectful attitude toward a mystery we can do no better than name "narwhal." Standing at the edge of a cliff, studying the sea-washed back of such a creature far below, as still as a cenobite in prayer, the urge to communicate, the upwelling desire, is momentarily sublime.

I stare out into Lancaster Sound. Four or five narwhals sleep on the flat calm sea, as faint on the surface as the first stars emerging in an evening sky. Birds in the middle and far distance slide through the air, bits of life that dwindle and vanish. Below, underneath the sleeping narwhal, fish surge and glide in the currents, and the light dwindles and is quenched.

The first description of a unicorn, according to British scholar Odell Shepard, appears in the writings of Ctesias, a Greek physician living in Persia in the fifth century B.C., who had heard reports of its existence from India. The existence of such an animal, a fierce, horselike creature of courageous temperament, with a single horn on its forehead, gained credibility later through the writings of Aristotle and Pliny and, later still, in the work of Isidore of Seville, an encyclopedist. The Bible became an unwitting and ironic authority for the unicorn's existence when Greek translators of the Septuagint rendered the Hebraic term *re'em* (meaning, probably, the now extinct aurochs, *Bos primigenius*) as "the unicorn."

The legend of the unicorn, and the subsequent involvement of the narwhal, is a story intriguing at many levels. Until well into the Middle Ages the legend passed only from one book to another, from one learned individual to another; it was not a part of the folk culture of Europe. During the Renaissance, scientists, scholars, and theologians put forth various learned "explanations" for the unicorn's existence. However farfetched these explanations might have seemed to skeptics, the concrete evidence of a narwhal's tusk to hand seemed irrefutable. Furthermore, no Christian could deny the unicorn's existence without contradicting the Bible.

Scholars argue that the animal in Ctesias' original report from Persia represents the transposed idea of an oryx or a rhinoceros. It went unquestioned, they speculate, because Greeks such as Ctesias took "the grotesque monstrosities of Indian religious art" rendered in the Persian tapestries they saw for real animals. In medieval Europe, trade in rare narwhal and walrus tusks, confusion with the mythical animals of Zoroastrian as well as Christian tradition, and the bucolic practice of making bizarre alterations in the horns of domestic animals, all lent credence to the legend. The interest of the wealthy and learned in this regal animal, moreover, went beyond mere fascination; it was also practical. European royalty was besieged with politically motivated poisonings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the unicorn's horn was reputedly the greatest proof against them.

In *The Lore of the Unicorn,* Odell Shepard writes of the great range of appreciation of Renaissance people for the unicorn's horn; it was "their companion on dark nights and in perilous places, and they held it near their hearts, handling it tenderly, as they would a treasure. For indeed it was exactly that. It preserved a man from the arrow that flieth by day and the pestilence that walketh in darkness, from the craft of the poisoner, from epilepsy, and from several less dignified ills of the flesh not to be named in so distinguished a connection. In short it was an amulet, a talisman, a weapon, and a medicine chest all in one."

The narwhal's tusk, traded in bits and pieces as the unicorn's horn, sold for a fortune in the Middle Ages, for twenty times its weight in gold. Shepard estimates that in mid-sixteenth-century Europe there were no more than fifty whole tusks to be seen, each with a detailed provenance. They were gifted upon royalty and the church and sought as booty by expeditionary forces who knew of their existence. Two tusks stolen from Constantinople in 1204 were delivered by Crusaders to the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Venice, where they may be seen to this day.

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The presence of these tusks in Europe depended upon Greenlandic and Icelandic trade. The oddity was that they were delivered to Europe by men like those who drowned with the Bishop of Iceland, sailors with no notion of unicorns and no knowledge of the value of the tusk to those who did know. On the other hand, the tusk was frequently bought by people who had not the remotest notion of the existence of such an animal as the narwhal.

The first European to bring these disparate perceptions together, it seems, was the cartographer Gerhard Mercator, who clearly identified the narwhal as the source of the unicorn's horn in 1621. In 1638, Ole Wurm, a Danish professor and a "zoologist and antiquarian of high attainment," delivered a speech in Copenhagen in which he made the same connection. But by then the story of the unicorn was simply too firmly entrenched at too many levels of European society to be easily dispelled, and the horn itself was too dear an item of commerce to be declared suddenly worthless. Besides, it was argued, was not the tusk simply the horn of the unicorn of the sea? Why shouldn't it have the same power as the horn of the land unicorn?

Over time the narwhal's tusk lost its influence in medical circles, trade dwindled, and the legend itself passed out of the hands of ecclesiastics and scholars to the general populace, where it became dear to the hearts of romantics, artists, and poets. It was passed on, however, in a form quite different from the secular tradition in Ctesias. In its secular rendering the unicorn was a creature of nobility and awesome though benign power. It was a creature of compassion, though solitary, and indomitably fierce. It became, as such, the heraldic symbol of knights errant and of kings. It was incorporated into the British coat of arms by James I in 1424, and in 1671 Christian V became the first Danish king to be crowned in a coronation chair made entirely of narwhal tusks.

Under Christian influence, the story of the unicorn became the story of a captured and tamed beast. The animal lost its robust, independent qualities, that aloofness of the wild horse, and was presented as a small, goatlike animal subdued by a maiden in a pastoral garden. The central episode of its fabulous life, its power to turn a poisonous river into pure water so that other creatures might drink, as Moses had done with his staff at the waters of Marah, passed into oblivion. The creature of whom it was once written in Solinus' *Polyhistoria,* "It is an animal never to be taken alive—killed possibly, but not captured," became a symbol of domestic virginity and obeisance.

One winter afternoon in Vancouver, British Columbia, I spoke with the only person ever to have succeeded in putting an adult narwhal, briefly, on display. (The six animals, brought back from northern Canada in 1970, all died of pneumonia within a few months.) Murray Newman, director of the British Columbia Aquarium, explained the great difficulties inherent in capturing such animals and later of maintaining them in captivity, especially the male, with its huge tusk. He doubted any aquarium would ever manage it successfully. The description from Solinus' *Polyhistoria* seemed at that moment, as we gazed across the aquarium's trimmed lawns toward Vancouver's harbor, oddly apt and prophetic.

A narwhal's tusk, hefted in the hands, feels stout but resilient. It is a round, evenly tapered shaft of ivory, hollow for most of its length. (The cavity is filled with dental pulp in the living animal.) A large tusk might weigh 20 pounds, be eight or nine feet long, and taper from a diameter of four inches at the socket down to a half-inch at the tip. The smooth, polished tip, two to three inches long, is roundly blunt or sometimes wedge-shaped. The rest of the tusk is striated in a regular pattern that spirals from right to left and may make five or six turns around the shaft before fading out. Often a single groove parallel to the spiraling striations is apparent. The tusk also shows a slight, very shallow ripple from end to end in many specimens.

The striated portion is rough to the touch, and its shallow grooves are frequently encrusted with algae. These microorganisms give the tusk a brindled greenish or maroon cast, contrasting with the white tip and with the 10 to 12 inches of yellower ivory normally embedded in the upper left side of the animal's skull.

Well into the nineteenth century there was a question about which of the sexes carried the tusk (or whether it might be both). Although many thought it was only the males, a clear understanding was confounded by authenticated reports of females with tusks (a female skull with *two* large tusks, in fact, was given to a Hamburg museum in 1684 by a German sea captain), and an announcement in 1700 by a German scientist, Solomon Reisel, that some narwhals carried "milk tusks." It did not help matters, either, that there was much conjecture but no agreement on the function of the tusk. (A more prosaic error further confused things—printers sometimes inadvertently reversed drawings, making it seem that the tusk came out of the right side of the head instead of the left, and that it spiraled from left to right.)

Several certainties eventually emerged. The tusk spirals from right to left. In normal development, two incipient tusks form as "teeth" in the upper jaw of both sexes, one on each side. In the female, both teeth usually harden into solid ivory rods with a protuberance at one end, like a meerschaum pipe (these were Reisel's "milk tusks"). In males, the tusk on the right remains undeveloped, "a miniature piece of pig iron," while the one on the left almost always develops into a living organ, a continually growing, fully vascularized tooth. On very rare occasions, both tusks develop like this, in both sexes. And both tusks spiral from right to left (i.e., they are not symmetrical like the tusks of an elephant or a walrus). Viewed from above, twin tusks diverge slightly from each other. In some males the left tusk never develops (nor does the right in these instances). In perhaps 3 percent of females a single tusk develops on the left.

Solving this problem in sexual systematics and physiology proved simpler than determining the tusk's purpose. It was proposed as a rake, to stir up fish on the seabed floor; as a spear to impale prey; and as a defensive

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weapon. All three speculations ignored the needs of narwhals without tusks. In addition, Robin Best, a Canadian biologist with a long-standing interest in the question, has argued that the tusk is too brittle to stand repeated use as a rake or probe; that attacking with the tusk the sorts of fish narwhals habitually eat would be difficult and unnecessary and getting large fish off the tusk problematic; and that there are no records of narwhals attacking other animals or defending themselves with their tusks.

The fact that narwhals frequently cross their tusks out of water and that the base of the tusk is located in the sound-producing region of the narwhal's skull led to speculation that it might serve some role in sound reception or propagation (again ignoring the female component of the population). Oral surgeons determined that the tooth's pulp does not contain the bioacoustical lipids necessary for echolocation, but this does not mean that the narwhal can't in some way direct sound with it and, as some have suggested, "sound-joust" with other males. (On their own, the oral surgeons speculated that because the tooth was so highly vascularized, the narwhal could get rid of a significant amount of body heat this way, which would presumably allow males to hunt more energetically. The biologists said no.)

William Scoresby, as bright and keen-eyed an observer as ever went to sea, speculated in 1820 that the tusk was only a secondary sexual characteristic, like a beard in humans, and was perhaps used to fracture light ice when narwhals of both sexes needed to breathe. Scientists say narwhals are too careful with their tusks to subject them to such impact, but on the first point Scoresby was correct.

Male narwhals engage in comparative displays of their tusks, like the males of other species, but they also appear to make some kind of violent physical contact with each other occasionally. The heads of many sexually mature males are variously scarred, and scientists have even found the broken tips of tusks in wounded narwhals. (A scientist who made a detailed examination of the narwhal's musculature said the muscles are not there in the neck to allow the animals to parry and thrust with rapierlike movements. Indeed, males appear always to move their tusks with deliberation, and dexterously, as at savssats.) The circumstances under which head scarring might occur—the establishment and continual testing of a male social hierarchy, especially during the breeding season—are known; but how these wounds are suffered or how frequently they are inflicted is still widely debated. One plausible thought is that males align their tusks head-on and that the animal with the shorter tusk is grazed or sometimes severely poked in the process.

A significant number of narwhals, 20 to 30 percent, have broken tusks. Some broken tusks have a curious filling that effectively seals off the exposed pulp cavity. Oral surgeons say this rod-shaped plug is simply a normal deposition of "reparative dentine," but others have long insisted it is actually the tip of another narwhal's tusk, to which it bears an undeniable resemblance. (The broken tips of other narwhals' tusks are filled with stones and sediment.)

Exposed tooth pulp creates a site for infection, not to mention pain. That animals would try to fill the cavity (if "reparative dentine" didn't) makes sense. That one narwhal entices another into this ministration is as intriguing a notion as the thought that males put the tips of their tusks on the opposite male's sound-sensitive melon and generate a "message" in sound-jousting. It would be rash to insist categorically that narwhals don't do *something* odd with the tusk on occasion, like prodding a flatfish off the sea bottom. (Herman Melville drolly suggested they used it as a letter opener.) But it seems clear that its principal, and perhaps only, use is social. Robin Best argues, further, that because of its brittleness, its length, and the high proportion of broken tusks, the organ may have reached an evolutionary end point.

A remaining question is, Why is the tusk twisted? D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, a renowned English biologist who died in 1948, offered a brilliant and cogent answer. He argued that the thrust of a narwhal's tail applied a very slight torque to its body. The tusk, suspended tightly but not rigidly in its socket in the upper jaw, resisted this force with a very slight degree of success. In effect, throughout its life, the narwhal revolved slowly around its own tusk, and over the years irregularities of the socket gouged the characteristic striations in the surface of the tooth.

Thompson pointed out that the tooth itself is not twisted—it is straight-grained ivory, engraved with a series of low-pitched threads. No one has disproved, proved, or improved upon Thompson's argument since he set it forth in 1942.

Because the ivory itself dried out and became brittle and hard to work, the greatest virtue of a narwhal tusk to the Eskimos who traditionally hunted the animal was its likeness to a wood timber. Some of the regions where narwhals were most intensively hunted were without either trees or supplies of driftwood. The tusk served in those places as a spear shaft, a tent pole, a sledge thwart, a cross brace—wherever something straight and long was required.

Narwhals were most often hunted by Eskimos during their near-shore migration in spring, and in bays and fiords during the summer. To my knowledge, Eskimos attach no great spiritual importance to the narwhal. Like the caribou, it is a migratory food animal whose spirit (*kirnniq*) is easily propitiated. The narwhal does not have the intercessionary powers or innate authority of the polar bear, the wolf, the walrus, or the raven.

Beyond its tusk, Greenlanders valued the narwhal's skin above all other leathers for dog harnesses, because it remained supple in very cold weather and did not stretch when it became wet. The sinews of the back were prized as thread not only for their durability but also for their great length. The outside layer of the skin was an important source of vitamin C, as rich in this essential vitamin as raw seal liver. The blubber, which burned with a bright, clean yellow flame, gave light and warmth that were utilized to carve a fishhook or sew a mitten inside the iglu in winter. A single narwhal, too, might feed a dog team for a month.

It is different now. The hunter's utilitarian appreciation of this animal is an attitude some now find offensive;

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and his considerable skills, based on an accurate and detailed understanding of the animal and its environment, no longer arouse the sympathetic admiration of very many people.

In the time I spent watching narwhals along the floe edge at Lancaster Sound in 1982 no whale was butchered for dog food. The dogs have been replaced by snow machines. No sinews were removed for sewing. Only the tusk was taken, to be traded in the village for cash. And muktuk, the skin with a thin layer of blubber attached, which was brought back to the hunting camp at Nuvua. (This delicacy is keenly anticipated each spring and eaten with pleasure. It tastes like hazelnuts.)

The narwhal's fate in Lancaster Sound is clearly linked with plans to develop oil and gas wells there, but current hunting pressure against them is proving to be as important a factor. In recent years Eskimo hunters on northern Baffin Island have exhibited some lack of discipline during the spring narwhal hunt. They have made hasty, long-range, or otherwise poorly considered shots and used calibers of guns and types of bullets that were inadequate to kill, all of which left animals wounded. And they have sometimes exceeded the quotas set by Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and monitored by the International Whaling Commission.* On the other side, Eskimos have routinely been excluded by the Canadian government from the upper levels of decision-making in these matters and have been offered no help in devising a kind of hunting behavior more consistent with the power and reach of modern weapons. For the Eskimos, there is a relentless, sometimes condescending scrutiny of every attempt they make to adjust their culture, to "catch up" with the other culture brought up from the south. It is easy to understand why the men sometimes lose their accustomed composure.

In the view of Kerry Finley, a marine mammal biologist closely associated with the Baffin Island narwhal hunts, "It is critical [to the survival of narwhals] that Inuit become involved in meaningful positions in the management of marine resources." The other problems, he believes, cannot be solved until this obligation is met.

I would walk along the floe edge, then, in those days, hoping to hear narwhals, for the wonder of their company; and hoping, too, that they would not come. The narwhal is a great fighter for its life, and it is painful to watch its struggle. When they were killed, I ate their flesh as a guest of the people I was among, out of respect for distant ancestors, and something older than myself.

I watched closely the ivory gull, a small bird with a high, whistly voice. It has a remarkable ability to appear suddenly in the landscape, seemingly from nowhere. I have scanned tens of square miles of open blue sky, determined it was empty of birds, and then thrown a scrap of seal meat into a lead, where it would float. In a few minutes an ivory gull would be overhead. It is hard to say even from what direction it has come. It is just suddenly there.

So I would watch them in ones and twos. Like any animal seen undisturbed in its own environment, the ivory gull seems wondrously adapted. To conserve heat, its black legs are shorter in proportion to its body than the legs of other gulls, its feet less webbed. Its claws are longer and sharper, to give it a better grip of frozen carrion and on the ice. It uses seaweed in its nest to trap the sun's energy, to help the incubation of its eggs. To avoid water in winter, which might freeze to its legs, it has become deft at picking things up without landing. In winter it follows the polar bear. When no carrion turns up in the polar bear's wake, it eats the polar bear's droppings. It winters on the pack ice. Of the genus *Pagophila*. Ice lover.

And I would think as I walked of what I had read of a creature of legend in China, an animal similar in its habits to the unicorn but abstemious, like the ivory gull. It is called the *ki-lin*. The *ki-lin* has the compassion of the unicorn but also the air of a spiritual warrior, or monk. Odell Shepard has written that "[u]nlike the western unicorn, the *ki-lin* has never had commercial value; no drug is made of any part of his body; he exists for his own sake and not for the medication, enrichment, entertainment, or even edification of mankind." He embodied all that was admirable and ideal.

With our own Aristotelian and Cartesian sense of animals as objects, our religious sense of them as mere receptacles for human symbology, our single-mindedness in unraveling their workings, we are not the kind of culture to take the *ki-lin* very seriously. We are another culture, and these other times. The *ki-lin*, too, is no longer as highly regarded among modern Chinese as it was in the days of the Sung dynasty. But the idea of the *ki-lin*, the mere fact of its having taken shape, is, well, gratifying. It appeared after men had triumphed over both their fear and distrust of nature and their desire to control it completely for their own ends.

The history of the intermingling of human cultures is a history of trade—in objects like the narwhal's tusk, in ideas, and in great narratives. We appropriate when possible the best we can find in all of this. The *ki-lin*, I think, embodies a fine and pertinent idea—an unpossessable being who serves humans when they have need of its wisdom, a creature who abets dignity and respect in human dealings, who underlines the fundamental mystery with which all life meets analysis.

I do not mean to suggest that the narwhal should be made into some sort of symbolic *ki-lin*. Or that buried in the more primitive appreciation of life that some Eskimos retain is an "answer" to our endless misgivings about the propriety of our invasions of landscapes where we have no history, of our impositions on other cultures. But that in the simple appreciation of a world not our own to define, that poised arctic landscape, we might find some solace by discovering the *ki-lin* hidden within ourselves, like a shaft of light. □

*These charges are detailed in K.J. Finley, R.A. Davis, and H.B. Silverman, "Aspects of the Narwhal Hunt in the Eastern Canadian Arctic," *Report of the International Whaling Commission* 30 (1980): 459-464; and K.J. Finley and G.W. Miller, "The 1979 Hunt for Narwhals (*Monodon monoceros*) and an Examination of Harpoon Gun Technology Near Pond Inlet, Northern Baffin Island," *Report of the International Whaling Commission* 32 (1982): 449-460.

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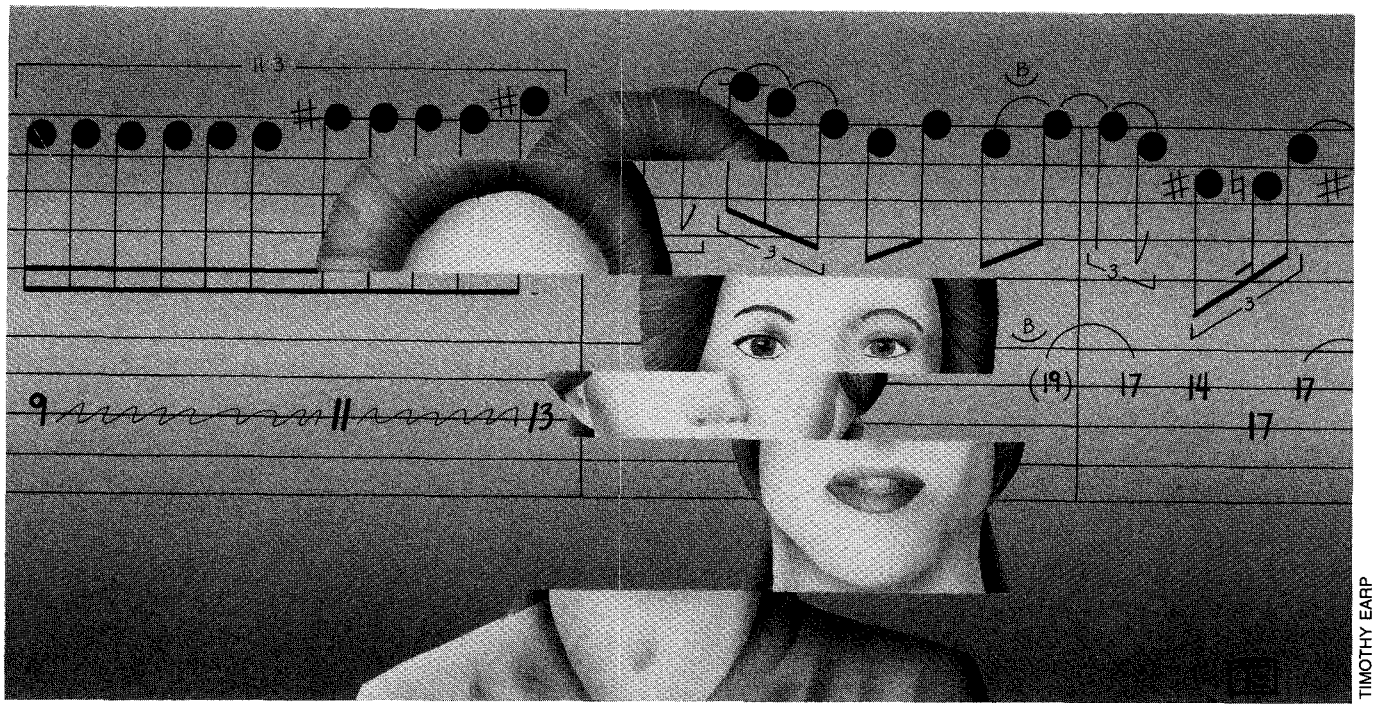

TIMOTHY EARP

MOVIE MUSIC

Marly Swick

And you know what else is weird?" It is two a.m. and I am propped up on one elbow in bed, chatting into the dark, still high from all the drinking and joking. I've just quit nursing Nicole and tonight was the first time I've been smashed in over a year.

My husband, Charlie, turns his back on me. "No," he says, like I am looking for an answer instead of a question.

I don't know why he does that. It always puts me in a bad mood. I feel all the fizz go out of me, like a glass of flat Coke. I just lie there in the dark wishing I were someone else somewhere else with someone else.

Earlier in the evening we had laughed ourselves sick playing the Baby Boomer edition of Trivial Pursuit with Charlie's brother, Clem, and my best friend, Janelle. After they went home (separately), we'd watched the tail end of Johnny Carson in bed and made love. It was the first time I had agreed to keep the light on since Nicole was born five months ago. We had gone to Lamaze class and I had quit smoking and drinking and started swimming laps at the Y every morning, but when the time came, I had to have an emergency Caesarean, just as if I'd sat around for nine months watching TV and drinking Jim Beam. At the time, after twenty-six hours of labor, I wouldn't have cared if they'd gutted me like a fish, but I cried a couple of days later when they changed the bandage and I got a good look at the scar. I was expecting a bikini incision like my sister Deborah has. The nurse explained to me how in emergency cases like mine, where the monitor shows fetal distress, the doctor doesn't have time for cosmetics. The scar looked like a maroon zipper.

Suddenly, thinking about the scar and all I went through, I feel a powerful jolt of anger. I snap on the lamp next to the bed. "I'm talking to you," I say.

He flings his arm over his eyes. "Okay, so what's so goddamned weird?"

I am tempted to ignore him.

"I'm all ears." He yawns, over-exaggerating, like a silent screen star. "You were saying . . . ?"

I reach over to the night table and screw the cap on my K-Y jelly which is leaking onto the embroidered dresser scarf my sister brought us back from Communist China.

"I'm in love with Clem and we're going to live together," I say, "Nicole, Clem, and me. In California," I add, even though this—none of this—has ever even crossed my mind before and has nothing to do with what I had originally intended to say which was that Janelle had not missed one single question all evening and I suspected that since Richard left her and went back to his wife again, she was sitting at home alone at night listening to the radio and memorizing the answers to the Trivial Pursuit questions. The minute I hear this thing I've said, though, about Clem and me, I know it is going to come true, one way or another. I can feel it in my scar.

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Charlie rolls over facing me. He laughs, like it is a big joke. "Jesus, woman, what's got into you?" He pretends like he's unzipping my scar. "Zip, zip."

"Don't toy with me!" I shout, furious. I fling his arm off me. I hear his knuckles thwack against the mahogany headboard. He tucks his bruised hand under his armpit.

"I'm sorry," I whisper. "I didn't mean to."

"I know it." He reaches over his arm and pulls me to him. "You're drunk, baby." He strokes my hair and massages my temples. "You're going to have one hell of a hangover."

I start to cry. A tear dribbles into my mouth. It tastes like straight Jim Beam.

"Shhh," he says. "Go to sleep."

The baby in the next room starts to wail. I go to comfort her, but as I am holding her soft warm body with its sweet baby smell, it's not clear to me who is comforting whom.

Nothing has changed, but suddenly I am extremely anxious. I am walking on eggshells. It's as if my normal life has turned into one of those scarey movies, like *Psycho* or *Wait Until Dark*. As I change Nicole's diaper or fix dinner, I can hear the movie music running through my head like a soundtrack—that kind of nerve-jarring music they use to keep you on the edge of your seat. I jump every time the phone rings or a car door slams outside. I spend a lot of time peeking out at the street, hidden behind my drapes.

One Saturday afternoon I hear a car door slam and peek out through the lace bedroom curtains to see Clem coming up the walk. He is wearing jeans and a sweater I'd knit for Charlie that turned out too small for him and his normally bushy hair is slicked back, wet. Without his wild hair, he looks kind of pathetic, like a dog after a bath. As he walks up the front steps and rings the doorbell, I hold my hand over Nicole's mouth and rock her so she won't cry. He waits a minute, puzzled because he sees my old Valiant in the driveway, then leaves a paper bag on the front porch. As his Pinto turns the corner, I get the bag from the porch. I take out Charlie's electric drill which Clem borrowed a while back, and a bag of dried pineapple—my favorite—from the health food store in Cedar Rapids where he works a few hours a week while he is studying to be a chiropractor. When he gets his degree, he plans to open his own office on the beach in Santa Barbara, buy a VW convertible, and grow a beard.

I head for the kitchen but for no reason at all I decide to hide the pineapple at the bottom of the laundry basket. Then I dress Nicole warmly and take her for a walk to the drug store in her stroller, hoping she will fall asleep and nap for a couple of hours so that I can soak in a hot tub and maybe relax with a new magazine or two before it's time to start dinner.

On the way back, we stroll past the high school. Some boys are out on the field waiting for football practice. One boy with blonde hair runs up and down the bleachers, sure-footed as a mountain goat. He reminds me of Charlie, how he was when I started going out with him senior year in high school. I had hung around the bleachers every afternoon watching him practice. Whenever he would look over at me, I would look away, and whenever he saw me looking at him, he would pretend to be looking beyond me, at some invisible object in the distance. Finally he had told a friend of his who told his girlfriend who told one of my girlfriends who told me that he wouldn't mind going out with me. Whereupon I told my girlfriend who told her girlfriend who told her boyfriend who told Charlie that I would't mind going out with him.

We went to a drive-in movie and then drove out and sat by the Iowa River and confessed that we loved each other. We didn't have much to talk about in the beginning, so I remember he used to read me postcards from his older brother, Clem, who had hitchhiked to San Francisco and was crashing in a big old house near the Golden Gate Park making roach clips out of brass wire and beads. I remember I had no idea what a roach clip was. Charlie said it must be some sort of trap for cockroaches and speculated that the brightly colored beads lured the roaches into the metal traps.

Once, when Charlie's parents were away, we went up to his room and I saw some pictures of Clem. He looked skinny and pale and I remember telling Charlie that I thought he was much better looking than his brother. I guess that was just the encouragement he needed because he suddenly tackled me right there in his room. He pulled me down on the lower bunk bed and that was the first time we actually did it, although we had been doing everything else but for months.

About the time Charlie and I started sleeping together, Clem went on down to Mexico and the postcards took weeks, sometimes months to arrive. I liked the looks of Mexico on the postcards and hinted around that it looked like a good place to go for a honeymoon. Charlie's father kept threatening to go down to Mexico and drag Clem back, but we knew it was just talk. Mr. Knupfer had never been outside of Iowa in his life and didn't even like Chinese food.

After Mexico, Clem got himself a job on a ship going to Europe and Charlie got one of those thin aerograms with a red and blue border. I remember holding it and sniffing it and examining the ingenious way the paper turned right into an envelope. I had taken French in high school and I was proud of myself for knowing what "Par Avion" meant.

From Europe, Clem went on to India and by the time he finally arrived home with hepatitis, Charlie and I were already married and living in a two-bedroom apartment in Des Moines. Charlie and I were working days at the same department store—he worked in Furniture and I worked in Toys. Clem moved in with us for a few weeks, while he was gaining his stength back. When he was bored, he used to walk downtown to the department store and visit us. He would sit in the Barcalounger up on the fourth floor with Charlie and watch the row of TV's for sale. Then he would take the escalator down to Toys and walk around reading the game boxes or trying out the remote-control cars while I waited on customers. He was good with kids and played right along with them so that their mothers had to practically drag them kicking and screaming out of the store, away from Clem.

Nights, Charlie went to business school and Clem and

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I would sit at home playing Clue or Risk or some other game I had bought with my employee discount. My favorite was Risk. We would sit at opposite ends of the table, with the world spread out between us, and as his conquering armies invaded one country after another, Clem would tell me amusing stories about his adventures in Baja or Yugoslavia or Nepal.

One weekend when Charlie went duck hunting in Michigan with two friends from the business school, Clem and I spent two nights alone in the apartment together. The first night we drove to Iowa City, where the university is, to see this French movie that Clem wanted to see. I was nervous because I had never seen a movie with subtitles before, but as soon as the movie started, I forgot it wasn't in English. It was the strangest thing. Afterwards, I told Clem I didn't believe I had been reading subtitles; I believed that for two hours God had let me understand French. We were drinking wine at a coffee house near campus. I noticed how Clem fit in there with his tied-back long hair, his Indian shirt and water buffalo sandals. Charlie and I had always thought of him as an exotic misfit, but suddenly I felt like the misfit in my dressy dress, nylons, and patent leather pumps.

The second night Clem cooked me some chicken curry and played me some songs he'd written on his guitar. Then he brought out a couple of joints from the pocket of his embroidered workshirt. Charlie didn't like him to smoke in the apartment, but I knew he smoked in his room after we'd gone to bed. I could smell it when I got up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. I had smoked a couple of times with friends, but this stuff was stronger. He said it was from Thailand. I felt like everything was suddenly more than it usually was: brighter, louder, bigger, funnier, scarier, closer. I felt like I'd suddenly lost the knack of being myself—I couldn't remember where to put my hands, what to say, how to stop smiling. Clem suggested we go for a walk. I put on my coat and we must have walked five miles while Clem pointed out the constellations and told me stories about when he and Charlie were growing up. I felt like I understood more about Charlie during that walk than I'd understood in the year and a half I'd been his wife, but part of it must just have been the marijuana, because when Charlie came back from Michigan the next day, all those big insights I'd had seemed all shriveled up, like pricked balloons.

When we got back inside the house from our walk, Clem took my hand at the bottom of the stairs and looked right into my eyes, right into me. No one had ever looked at me like that, not even Charlie. He kissed me on the forehead where he'd told me the Third Eye was and then he kind of spun me around and pushed me up the stairs. He stayed downstairs while I used the bathroom and got into Charlie's and my bed. I heard him playing music downstairs till all hours. When I got up in the morning, he was asleep on the couch and the turntable was spinning silently.

Once he was all recovered, Clem borrowed some money from us, bought himself a Harley-Davidson and went back to California. We didn't see much of him after that for five or six years. He and Charlie kept in touch with an occasional postcard or phone call on holidays. Clem went to one of those state universities out there and got a degree in film, then moved to Hollywood and wrote us that he was working as a gaffer, a lighting man, in television. He was married once for a few months, but they were already divorced by the time Charlie and I flew out there for a week's vacation one summer.

Clem worked till all hours—he was working on "Laverne and Shirley"—so Charlie and I rented a car and drove up and down the coast. Charlie had just been promoted to manager of a new McDonald's in Des Moines and we stopped at every McDonald's from L.A. to San Francisco until I threw a fit in Los Banos and threatened to stick my finger down my throat and throw up all over the next McDonald's we stopped in. After that, Charlie seemed to lose interest in traveling and we ended up going back to Clem's apartment two days early. I went to the studio lot and ate in the commissary with Clem, alert to the possibility of movie stars, while Charlie played golf with Clem's next-door neighbor.

On the plane ride home I told Charlie that I didn't think Clem seemed very happy. He didn't seem to have many friends and his place looked about as homey as a Motel 6 room. He didn't even own any pots and pans. "I think he's still in love with that wife of his," I said.

"I saw a picture of her. She wasn't so hot." Charlie signalled the stewardess for a second drink. "She was kind of puny looking."

"Maybe so," I said, "but he's not over her yet."

"He'll find himself someone else. A TV starlet." He tried to unscrew the cap of his doll-size scotch bottle. He had put on some weight in the past couple of years and his hands seemed big and clumsy. "That's what I'd do in his shoes."

"Clem's not like you." I reached over and unscrewed the cap for him.

"That's right," Charlie winked. "I'm the good-looking one. You always said so."

"Really?" I said. "I'd forgotten." He laughed, but I really had.

Not long after that, Clem had some sort of nervous collapse and came home to Cedar Rapids for a rest. Charlie's father had died of a heart attack a few years back, so Clem moved into their old family house on Mulberry Avenue with his mother. She was glad to have him back and it took a load off us, not having to worry that she would fall down the stairs and break her hip and lie there for days until the next time we drove down from Des Moines for a visit. He dug up the backyard and planted a big vegetable garden. When we asked him what he was planning to do for the future, he said he would let us know just as soon as he did. One day, six months or so later, he called us up, very excited, and said he'd decided to become a chiropractor. I remembered that he had injured his back lifting some heavy equipment in California and had gone to a chiropractor out there who cured his back pain. Clem seemed to think of this guy right up there with Albert Schweitzer. When he called, I was pregnant with Nicole and was having lower back pain myself. I imagined

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lying in a cool, quiet office with Clem's fingers magically massaging my spine, easing the strain.

Now the back pain is just a dim memory and Nicole is here, big as day, sitting in her stroller chewing on her chubby fist. The high school boys have put on their helmets and are tossing the football back and forth. I wheel the stroller back and forth behind the barbed wire fence, keeping my eye on Number 11, the one who reminds me of Charlie. I shake out my hair, making sure none of it is caught under my jacket collar, and stand up straight, sucking in my stomach, which is still not as flat as it was before Nicole was born. The boy glances over but seems to look right through me. My smile collapses. I suppose to him I just look like someone's wife and mother out walking her baby.

When Charlie comes home that night, I have set my hair on hot rollers and brushed it upside down so that it floats around my face. I am wearing a low-cut sweater and my designer jeans. He whistles when he walks in the door, pinches my rear, and kisses the tops of my breasts. I sit on his lap in the kitchen while we wait for the noodles to cook. Nicole contentedly gums a rice cracker in her babyseat at the other end of the table. As I drain the noodles, I can feel the steam from the boiling water making my hair go limp, but I feel reassured that I still have a few good years left. I can feel Charlie's eyes glued to me as I sashay back and forth between the table and the stove in my backless high heels.

Ever since I said that crazy thing about Clem and me, I have been studying Charlie's behavior to see if it had any particular effect on him. You would think your wife tells you she's in love with your brother, that would get under your skin at least a little. Even if you thought she was kidding or drunk or something, it would still get to you, like when you answer a wrong number in the middle of the night—it just makes you uneasy. It's like the bad news you'd expected is still out there waiting for you. But as far as I can see, it just went in one ear and out the other. I am relieved, of course, but also a little miffed. It just seems typical somehow, although I can't think of anything like this that has ever happened before.

Unlike me, Charlie doesn't brood over things. With Charlie, what you see is what you get. So when he tells me he's invited Clem to dinner on Sunday, even though I can hear that creepy movie music in my ears and my heart flaps like birds' wings in my chest, I don't suspect him of any underhanded motive. He is holding Nicole on his lap, making funny faces at her. I walk over and kiss him lightly on the top of his head, where his thin hair is getting thinner. He smells faintly of french fries. His dream is to own his own franchise and he has the site picked out, not far from the high school. Sometimes lying in bed he likes to fantasize about how when Nicole is in high school, he'll have his own McDonald's and Nicole will be able to bring all her friends by to eat for free after the football games.

The Wednesday before the Sunday that Clem is coming for dinner, Janelle stops by on her way home from work. She teaches jazzercise at a fancy new health spa. She is all excited over this psychic one of the new women in her class told her about. The psychic predicted that the woman would become involved in the performing arts before the end of the year, and two weeks later she found a flier for Janelle's jazzercise class under the windshield wiper of her car while she was parked at the grocery store and decided to enroll. Janelle has the psychic's address and wants me to go along with her. I know what Janelle wants to know. She wants to know whether Richard is going to get bored with being faithful to his wife and come slinking back to Janelle, and I could predict with absolute certainty that he will (since he always does), and save Janelle the five bucks, but I also know with absolute certainty that she won't listen to me.

The psychic lives in a ranch house in a new subdivision on the east side of town. She sits us down on her sofa in the living room and offers us some canned sodas and some corn bugles. She has a six-month-old boy in a playpen in the corner of the dining room and I unzip Nicole's jacket and put her in the playpen across from the boy. The two babies stare at each other in alarm.

The psychic's name is Marge. She looks too normal, I think, to be a convincing psychic. She is wearing khaki pants and a pink polo shirt and loafers. She doesn't use a crystal ball or cards or tea leaves—no props. She simply holds Janelle's hand loosely in her lap and looks at her intently. I can feel Janelle's faith wavering although she *wants* to believe. Marge tells her some stuff that, at least in my opinion, is completely off the mark. She says that she can tell that Janelle is a very creative and spiritual person. As far as I know, Janelle hasn't done anything creative since we made ashtrays together in third grade, and her idea of a Higher Being is Robert Redford. The psychic also tells her that the man Janelle is involved with really loves her and will ask her to marry him by the end of the month. Marge says she sees a June wedding. Janelle is overjoyed, obviously having chosen to ignore the fact that Richard is already married to someone else and therefore could not possibly be marrying Janelle in June, two months from now, even if he wanted to, which, everyone but Janelle can see, he doesn't. Sometimes, like now, when I see Janelle acting so dense, I wonder why I have remained friends with her over the years.

"Now it's your turn," Janelle beams at me.

I hold out my hand dutifully. Marge cups her hands around mine and I feel a pleasant exchange of energy. I like her even if she is a fake. It has been years since I've held a woman's hand, since my grandmother died, and I'm enjoying the cool, soft gentleness of her touch.

"You," she says, "don't belong here. I see you by the ocean. There are palm trees. It's hot, the sun is shining."

"Am I alone?" I whisper hoarsely.

"No," she says. "There's your little girl and a thin man with bushy hair and a beard."

"A beard?" Janelle shrugs, mystified, and raises her eyebrows at me. She insists on paying for both of us. In the car she says, "Amazing how she could be so on target with me and so off with you, isn't it?"

"Nobody's perfect," I say.

That night I can't sleep. In the middle of the night I walk downstairs to the kitchen in my nightgown and call my

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sister Deborah in Honolulu, not so much because we are close but because it is still only nine p.m. there. When her Irish live-in babysitter, what Deborah calls her "O'Pair," answers, I remember how little we actually have in common even if we are sisters. She is married to a real estate tycoon, her second marriage, and has gone back to school to get her master's degree in psychology. I almost never make long distance calls, and when she first recognizes my voice, she sounds worried, braced for disaster. I have to assure her that Mom, Daddy, Grandad, Charlie, and Nicole are all fine before it occurs to her to ask me how I am.

"Something funny's going on here," I whisper. "I've got this bad feeling." As I explain to her, I keep looking over my shoulder and lowering my voice. She keeps saying "What?" and "Can't you speak louder?" I know that Charlie's sound asleep, but it feels like the walls have ears.

"Has anything, you know, actually *happened* between you and Clem?" she asks when I'm finished.

"No," I say. "Not a thing."

"It sounds to me like you *want* it to," she says. She is always saying things like that since she started studying psychology.

"I don't," I say. "I just feel like somehow it's *going* to. You know, like in a dream when someone's chasing you and you're running down this alley and that alley and at the end of every alley, you run smack into him."

"Are you saying that Clem is chasing you?"

"No," I sigh. I can tell this is useless. She doesn't understand. "It's this creepy feeling I have. Like it's in the cards, you know—Fate or something. It's not just me. The psychic saw it, too."

"Hmmmn," Deborah says. "It reminds me of Oedipus. You know, how he left town because of what the oracle said and then ended up sleeping with his mother anyway."

I can hear Nicole fussing in her bassinet upstairs. I grip the receiver tighter and will her to hush up. "How'd he end up sleeping with her if he'd gone away?" I ask.

"I forget," Deborah says. "It was just Fate, like what you were saying. That's the point."

My heart is beginning to race. If Nicole starts to wail, Charlie will wake up. The two things in the world that get him most riled are being woken up and long distance phone bills.

"I was thinking I might go away for a while, but I had this feeling it wouldn't make any difference," I say glumly.

"I think you're just worn out," she says. "I got that way after Cody was born. Your mind just . . ."

"I've got to go," I interrupt. "Nicole is crying."

"Take care," she says. "And don't worry."

Sunday is the first clear, warm day we've had in a week. Charlie wakes up in a good mood. When Nicole cries, he brings her into our bed and the three of us play hide and seek under the covers until Charlie sniffs Nicole's bottom and hands her to me. I get up, change her diapers, and dress her in some new pink overalls that my mother sent. After breakfast, Charlie mows the lawn, back and forth across the yard with Nicole strapped to his back like a papoose. I have to smile as I watch them out the laundry room window. Her sunbonnet has slipped to a crazy angle and her bright blue eyes take it all in, big as saucers. For a moment, as I dump the dirty clothes into the washer, I am so proud of my little family that I forget to feel afraid. I think maybe the psychic has me confused with someone else.

By five o'clock I have done the grocery shopping, cleaned the house, and marinated the chicken. When I take the clean clothes out of the dryer, I find the bag of dried pineapple, hardly any worse for the wear. I tear the bag open and put the pineapple in a blue bowl on the counter. Charlie is out back, drinking beer, tending the smoldering charcoal briquets. Nicole has finally, reluctantly, drifted off to sleep. I have an hour before Clem is due to arrive and I shout out to Charlie that I'll be in the shower.

As I undress, I am careful to avoid looking at my body in the full-length mirror on the door and as I soap myself, I avoid touching the raised scar. When I go downstairs, dressed in fresh jeans and a new white blouse, Clem is already seated in a lawn chair by the grill. Seated next to him, through a cloud of smoke, I see a woman with curly blonde hair, like mine. No one said anything to me about another guest. Mentally I count up the number of chicken parts and even though there is enough for two pieces each, I am suddenly in a bad mood.

Clem stands up and gives me a bear hug. "This is Greta," he says, introducing the smiling blonde woman. "When we met, I told her she reminded me of my sister-in-law. Don't you think so, Charlie?"

Charlie nods vaguely and begins slapping chicken pieces onto the grill. Greta and I smile at each other, probably each privately insulted. I know I am. We might have the same coloring, but she has at least fifteen pounds on me and is dressed like a guerrilla soldier.

"You know Clem for long?" I ask her, just as she's stuffing a deviled egg, which they brought, into her mouth.

"About three months," she says when she swallows. She smiles at Clem who is uncorking a bottle of wine.

"Three months!" I say, shocked. "Clem never said a word."

"He's a sly dog," Charlie winks and slaps a breast onto the grill.

"We met at a bookstore," Clem says. "We were buying the same book." He wraps his fingers lightly around hers as he pours wine into her glass. "You'll like this wine," he says to me. "Gewürtstraminer. Tastes like petunias."

I sip my wine without comment. Charlie sits down opposite us with his beer. He looks back and forth between Greta and me. "You two could be sisters all right." He waves his spatula in our direction. His eyes look a little out of focus, like he's having momentary difficulty remembering who is who.

I am mostly silent, except for an occasional snide comment, during dinner. However, no one notices, it seems, because Greta is a non-stop talker. She talks about

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books and movies and foreign travel. She reminds me of that man in the Federal Express commercial, the speed talker. Clem listens attentively and laughs a lot when she talks. Sometimes he disagrees with her opinions, which perks me up a little. Then, unfortunately for her, part way through dinner she makes the mistake of telling Charlie that her very first paying job was working at a McDonald's in Amsterdam. That's all Charlie needs to get him going on his favorite topic of conversation. Clem and I just exchange glances, smile and roll our eyes.

I have drunk several glasses of wine by this point and my mood has risen several notches. I am beginning to feel flattered that he chose a woman who looks like me, even such a poor copy, and the movie music in my head has gone away. I figure the psychic just got us confused. She saw blonde hair and blue eyes and naturally assumed it was me. Suddenly everything seems safe and normal again. A backyard barbecue in Iowa seems about as far away from Greek drama as you can get. Then it happens. I reach over and pat Clem's hand, friendly and relaxed, and I feel this charge of pure electricity shoot up my arm so strong it nearly knocks me off my chair. I jerk my hand away. There's heat rising between my legs. I am afraid to look across the table at him. I start fanning myself with my paper napkin. Out of the corner of my eye I can see Greta giving me a funny look. Charlie is still going on about Chicken McNuggets.

"Time for dessert," I say, and leap up from the table, overturning my chair.

Clem reaches over and rights it as he follows me into the kitchen, carrying a stack of dishes.

When I open the screendoor to the kitchen, Nicole is bawling upstairs as if she senses her nice little world is hanging in the balance. I climb the stairs to her room and lean over her crib, kissing her soft naked tummy. I murmur sweet nothings to soothe her as I tug her wet diaper out from under her. I hear footsteps on the stairs and can sense someone standing at the doorway. I don't even have to turn around: I know it's Clem. I focus all my energy on wiping Nicole's bottom and the tiny crack between her legs, trying to think what I am going to say, what I am going to do to outwit Fate. When I straighten up and turn around finally, holding Nicole to my breast like a shield, it is Charlie standing there in the dusky hallway, alone, smiling at us. Whatever I was going to say flies right out of my mind as if it were never there.

"They had to go," he says. "They're leaving for Florida tomorrow early and they didn't realize how late it was getting to be."

"Florida?" I say blankly.

"Her folks have a condo down there on the beach and they're driving down to meet them."

"Sounds serious," I say. I feel a pain I can't place and then realize that Nicole is pulling on my hair. I tug the strand of hair out from between her clenched fists.

"Clem said to tell you good-bye and thanks for supper."

I nod and hand the baby over to Charlie.

The dishes are stacked neatly in the sink where Clem must have left them. It's almost dark in the kitchen, restful. I don't bother to turn on the light. As I plunge my hands into the hot white froth, I picture Clem and Greta running in and out of the surf, framed by palm trees, and I wonder if Fate ever just loses its way, like a package delivered to the wrong address. It would seem only natural. Nothing's perfect. And from a distance, we do look alike—she and I. As I am fishing in the warm water for loose knives and forks, the phone rings and I stretch out a soapy hand to answer it.

"Hi," Janelle says, "It's me."

"Don't tell me," I say, "Richard's back."

"How'd you know?" she says, disappointed that I jumped the gun.

"I'm psychic," I say. "So how is it this time?"

As I listen to the familiar, doomed details of their romance, I sink into a kitchen chair and close my eyes. After a minute, even sitting in a chair seems to require too much effort. I slide off the chair onto the cool floor, murmuring an occasional "uh-huh." I lie on my back on the fake brick linoleum and rest the receiver on top of both my eyelids, like one of those small plastic eye-protectors people wear under sun lamps. I pretend I am lying on the beach in Florida. Janelle's voice sounds distant and hollow, like there is an ocean between us. In Florida, the sun is blazing, I am wearing a black bikini, my scar is gone, and everything is perfect. □

JUDITH KROLL

FIGURES OF SILENCE

In Sanskrit the letters are "Little Goddesses."
God and his names are one.
The Name will take you across.

Meanwhile, the little helpers—
scene, sound,
woman, man,

I wait till it happens again:
you come in another form,
another disguise, and then

I open the door to a magic cottage
and enter a state of such silence

that all I say is true

and all you answer, the bridge
beneath which I am flowing.

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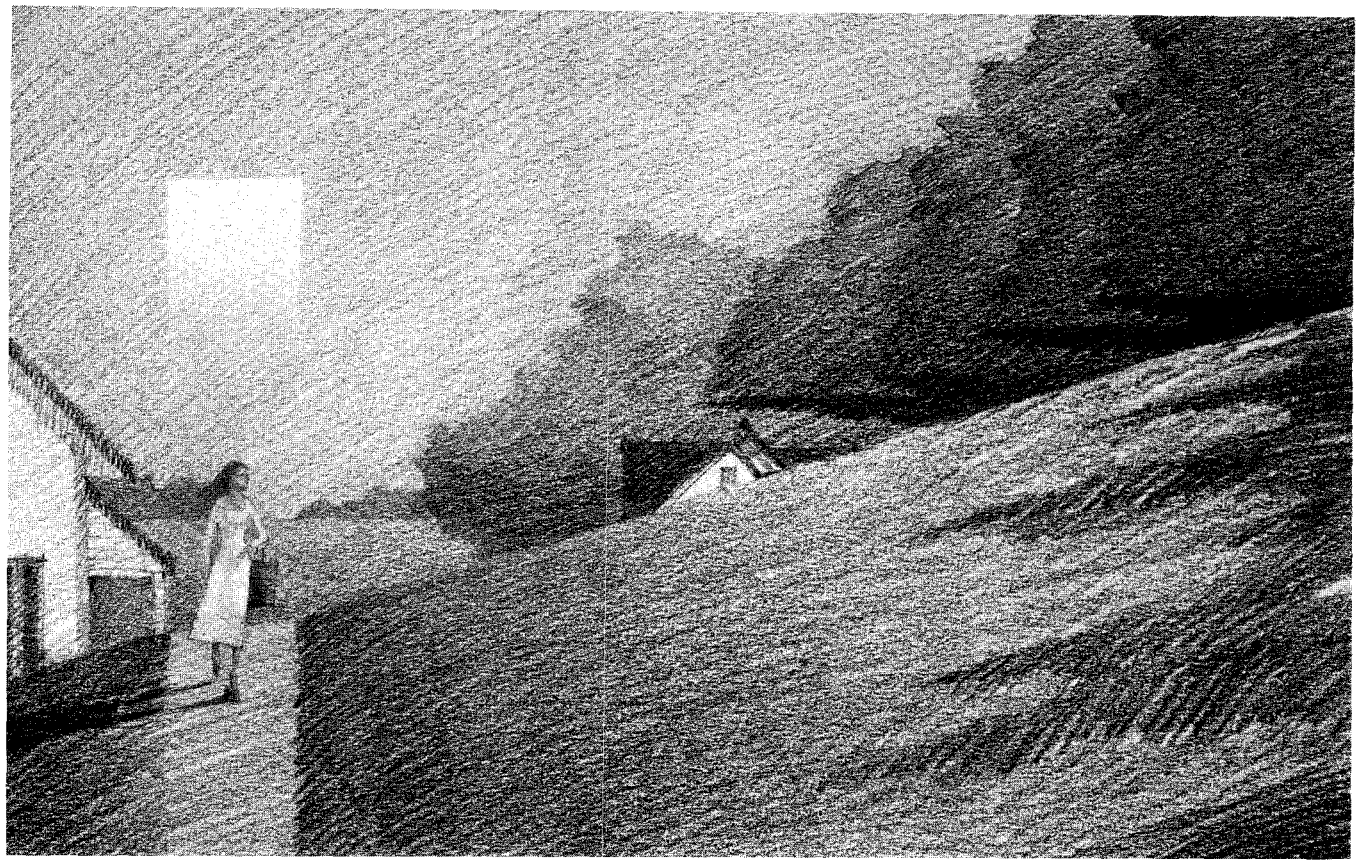

JAMES BUCKELS

REBA

Amelie Walmsley

When the child's nurse died in her sleep of a heart attack, he was not allowed to go to the funeral. He wasn't old enough, his mother said; funerals were morbid, his father claimed. They didn't tell Milo the real reason for their decision: they were about to file for divorce and wanted to spare him unnecessary grief. In Louisiana, filing for divorce meant a year's trial separation.

Milo's mother and father went to the funeral by themselves. They left Milo with a babysitter who mixed grits that were too salty and that he vomited later, in secret. When his parents came home, Milo waited up to ask them what Reba's funeral was like.

"Oh, like all funerals," said his mother, "I cried."

This didn't help much, since Milo had never been to a funeral. He pestered his father for details. "Was there music? What kind? How many people were there? Were you and Mother the only white people? Did *you* cry? What was Reba wearing? Was she smiling?" Milo's father, who was suffering from laryngitis at the time, pointed to his throat and shook his head.

After his father recovered from the sore throat, Milo asked him about Reba. He and his father were sitting in the back yard, where there was an old ruined pear orchard. Milo's father told him that Reba was part Indian, and that once he had driven her home, to her house in the poor colored section of town, and Reba had asked him inside. Inside, Reba and his father drank several beers and reminisced about his father's childhood, when Reba was a girl. Reba got drunk after two beers, his father said.

"What did she do?" Milo asked, "How did she act?"

"She got wild in the eyes and brought out a gun. Nothing happened. I persuaded her to put the gun away and came on home."

This story didn't fit in with Milo's memory of Reba. A mild, raw-boned woman with bunions on her feet, Reba came to work every day with a brown paper bag, inside of which was a treat for him. She never punished him either. Once, when his mother caught him playing with matches and went to slap Milo's hand, Reba reared up and hissed, "Don't you dare touch my baby," so his mother backed down. Milo remembered afterwards burying his face in the soft bosom of Reba's dress, which was studded with needles and safety pins like a miniature arsenal.

Milo couldn't get used to the idea that Reba was dead. When he came into the kitchen, he still expected to hear Reba singing. One hymn in particular Milo associated with her and wished he knew the words to. But it was too late now to ask her to write the words down; besides, Reba had never learned to write.

Two weeks after Reba's funeral his parents separated.

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They told him he would live with his mother and see his father on weekends. Milo was shocked; he had been under the impression that Reba's death ended with Reba, that it had no further meaning for him. He saw he was wrong. Reba had been the one who kept his world intact; now it flew apart and ricocheted like gunshot.

In the face of this hard thing Milo made himself forget about Reba. He needed all his strength now, to get through this. He took down Reba's picture, the only one of her in existence, taken by his father through a stand of ferns. The picture showed Reba walking on a gravel path, unaware she was being photographed. Reba believed if you let someone take your picture, they took your soul.

His father came into his room to tell Milo goodbye. "Well son," he said, "I'm going. I won't be far away. If you need anything, don't hesitate to call. And I'll see you every Saturday."

Milo didn't answer. He had no vocabulary for what was happening to him and thought it better not to speak. He looked out of the window, defiant. His father patted his head and turned to leave when he suddenly remembered something.

"I never told you about the old man at Reba's funeral, did I?"

"What old man?" Milo said.

"You remember I had a sore throat? Well, as your mother and I were leaving the funeral parlor to drive to the cemetery, an old Indian came up and rapped on the glass. We rolled down the window and he said he needed a ride. We drove to the cemetery with him, and the old guy noticed my sore throat. He pulled out a bottle of some stuff he had brewed, an old Choctaw remedy made with creosote and whiskey. Mumbo-jumbo, but it worked."

Milo nodded. He felt he had been given an important piece of information about Reba's funeral, if only he could fit it in with what else he knew. Listening at his parents' door, he had overheard them describing the mortician's makeup job on Reba. "Painted like a wild Indian," his father said, "a damn shame."

Picturing Reba dead and twisted out of recognition from what she had been while alive, Milo wept. He thought of Reba's pale creamy skin, sprinkled with a galaxy of freckles. He cried more thinking about Reba painted than he did when his father left. He felt guilty, too, for that.

School started. Milo felt funny the first day, going without a father; everyone on the bus knew that his parents were separated and turned to look at him when he walked down the aisle of the bus. After the first day, it got easier. Milo made an effort to draw a line around himself, to concentrate on his school work. People commented on how well adjusted he was. His teachers praised his bravery, his discipline. How mature he was, they said, like a little man. Milo felt like a little man, in just that way. Like a man diminished inside, with a big exterior. When his teachers saw they could punish him like the others, without making him cry, they were pleased. This was treating him no differently, they said. They didn't know that when he went home at night, Milo practiced their punishments on himself so that he knew what to expect. Nothing they said could be worse than what he said to himself.

But his homeroom teacher, plump and kind-voiced, singled Milo out and was nice to him. Milo hated her and feared her attention. Once, she put her hand on his shoulder and he almost started crying. He felt he couldn't risk that ever happening to him again. He wanted everyone to be as hard as the world was. He forced himself to commit pranks, to solicit punishment from this teacher, but she never punished him, only looked at him in a soft and careful way which made him feel ashamed. He started going out of his way to avoid walking past her house, in case she saw him and invited him in.

At night he no longer dreamt. He was aware of an absence, of fields and highways sometimes, or of horses threading a forest, but these were not images in the sense Milo was used to; they were more like blind sockets.

Saturday was the unbearable day. His father came and took him and his mother out to dinner. The routine was that his father tried to understand him and be fatherly, while his mother wept. Once, his father took them to a restaurant on the other side of the Mississippi River that had been a cotton plantation long ago. During the soup, his mother cried.

"For God's sake," his embarrassed father said, "make an effort. Put your sunglasses on."

Milo looked away. He didn't like to see his mother crying; throughout dinner he tried to think of something else, of anything, the multiplication table even, but he couldn't think of anything. The world had no meaning. The sun set, briefly coloring the columns of the plantation a vivid shrimp color before sinking in the abundant grass.

"Milo," his mother said, "you're not eating."

"I'm not hungry."

"All that beautiful food?" his father said, "what is the point of going to a restaurant if you don't eat?"

Milo excused himself from the table and wandered out to the grounds in back of the restaurant, where the cook kept parrots in a wire cage. These weren't ordinary parrots but giant, scarlet and green macaws. The skin around their eyes was gray and wrinkled, and they had long curved claws which they used to pull themselves closer to Milo. Their tongues were black and dry. Milo tried to teach them to talk. "Hello birds," he said, "how are you?" The parrots didn't answer; they cocked their heads quizzically to one side. Milo tried a whistle. This, they knew. They whistled back. He tried a trill; they trilled back. He laughed. "Ha," he said, "ha, ha."

"Ha," they said, "ha, ha."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha," Milo laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha." The parrots' laughter was uncanny, precise and mechanical, a human sound without human meaning. It frightened Milo. He tried to get the parrots to stop, but the birds laughed on, delighted with themselves. Milo covered his ears and ran, but he could hear the parrots long after he was out of earshot. At his parents' table, dessert had been served. Milo slid into his seat and studied his melting ice cream. He didn't mention the parrots.

At home, his mother locked herself in her bedroom. Milo could hear her crying into her pillow. He knocked on the door. Presently, his mother answered. "I can teach you something," Milo said, "I can teach you not to cry."

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His mother stared at him; her lower lip trembled, but a flicker of humor darted across her face. "You're a funny boy, Milo," she said, "why would I want to learn not to cry?"

"I can teach you," Milo said. "All you have to do is think of nothing."

"Think of nothing?" his mother said, "I'll try to remember."

One afternoon Milo was out in the tumble-down pear orchard behind the house when something extraordinary happened. He was poised to hurl a pear core at a palmetto tree when he saw two dainty feet lying in the grass, pointing skyward. The feet belonged to a body: Reba's. Reba as she looked when she was young. She wore a white gauze dress and two long plaits down her back. Milo had not known Reba then, had not even been born when she was a girl, but this was the way he had always imagined she looked. It didn't matter that she was dead. Her hands, clasped peacefully, held a spray of stephanotis. Reba was going dancing, at the May fete. Milo remembered her talking about it, how she had gone dancing in the country as a girl.

Milo stood and watched Reba, wondering what would happen next. He half expected Reba to get up and dance, but before long, Reba began to disappear. She stayed long enough to cast a milky opalescence into the dark part of himself, where most of him was hiding. He felt a slow healing start. Then the church bell on the corner pealed, and Reba was gone.

Milo didn't tell his mother. He knew his parents didn't believe these kinds of things happened and would be alarmed. The world, they said, was predictable. Dead was dead. Milo would never have been able to explain his feeling that Reba was dead, yet alive. He felt no confusion between the two, only that there was another state his parents didn't know about.

He went to the pear orchard again, several days later, when his mother was out and he was sure of being alone with Reba. He hadn't gone right away because he didn't want to seem greedy, or break the spell. He stood near the spot where he had seen Reba, and after a while, Reba came. He paid attention to how it happened: first, a kind of halo encircled the spot on the grass, and then, Reba appeared. He felt some part of himself revive.

There were days Reba appeared and days she didn't, yet each time Milo saw her he felt a numb spot in him awaken, like the greening of innumerable dead lawns. One winter day there was snow, an unusual occurrence, and Milo begged to be allowed to play outside later than usual. He pretended to be building a snow man when really he was waiting for Reba. He wasn't certain she could come; maybe it was too cold. But after awhile, he felt a tingling. There, blooming under the snow, Reba lay. This time she opened her eyes briefly, something she had never done before. That was in December.

In March Milo noticed a change in his mother. She cried less when she talked on the phone to his father and her voice sounded stronger. Those early phone calls, right after his parents' separation, had been terrible. First accusations, then silences; now there was something new: tentativeness.

At school his teachers accused him of dreaminess. "He's lost his old fire," one said. "He used to be so disciplined," said another. The nice teacher became pregnant and took a leave of absence. Milo found himself lingering in front of her house, dragging a long green stick against the pickets of her fence.

On Saturdays, Milo went alone on the excursions with his father. His mother seemed more excited about these outings than he was, though. She put on fresh lipstick and smiled encouragement from the doorway. When he got back from these Saturdays, she questioned him eagerly about the things he and his father had done together.

His father grew more talkative, which led Milo to ask him questions. During one lunch he asked his father, "Do you ever think about Reba anymore?"

"Sometimes," his father said. "She was a remarkable woman, battle-ax that she was, eh Milo? I'd like to have known her when she was younger. Must have been something as a girl."

Milo was silent. He wanted to tell his father about the real Reba, the Reba he had come to know in the pear orchard, but he didn't dare. He didn't trust his father enough to share the secret, although having the secret pained him.

At night, Milo often dreamt of Reba; each dream was lusher and more complete than the one before it. Milo dreamt of Reba dancing around the May-pole. Sometimes she would get tangled up in the streamers and fall down in the spring grass, laughing. Each time he dreamed about her, she seemed closer to finishing the dance; Milo got the feeling when the dance was over, he would stop having the dream. He did his best to draw the dreams out, but he didn't seem in control of them.

In June his mother asked him, "Milo, how would you feel if your father came back to live with us?"

"I don't care."

"Don't you still love Daddy? Don't you want him home?"

"I guess."

"But Milo," his mother said, "I'd like this to be a happy occasion."

Milo looked at her. "Do what you want to," he said, "since you're going to anyway."

His mother left him alone. In his room he questioned himself about his feelings for his father and was satisfied with his reply. He wasn't lying when he said he didn't care; he wasn't feigning cruelty. It was just that only he and Reba were real.

School ended, and Milo went more often to the orchard in the back yard, where the trees were hung with unripe fruit. Milo felt he was like the pears, hard, green, bitter, enduring. He picked one, took a bite, and spat. The pear was too bitter, even for him. He wished Reba would come, but he didn't feel that she would. A shadow edged across the lawn, closer and closer to the place Milo stood. He hadn't noticed how tall he had gotten. When after an hour's wait Reba wasn't there, Milo went home.

He realized Reba had been coming less and less often, and that her visits were shorter. Sometimes Milo went for weeks without seeing her, once a whole month. In the

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middle of June, the summer solstice, Milo returned from the orchard, disappointed in Reba, to see his father's car parked in the driveway. Suitcases were open in the hall, disgorging dirty laundry. His mother and father were in the kitchen, laughing. A bottle of champagne stood open on the counter.

"Milo, look," his mother called, "your father's back."

"It's true," said his father, "I've come home. Wait a minute, Milo, come here—"

Milo went into his room and shut the door. He had no lock on the door so he pushed his bureau against it and piled things on top of the bureau, for added weight. He didn't know who he expected to try to come after him; he wanted to keep the whole world away if he could. His father came after him and knocked.

"What's all this about Milo? Stop this foolishness," his father said.

"Poor thing," his mother said, "he was brave when you left. He hardly batted an eye."

"Kids," said his father in a disgusted voice. Then they both went away into their bedroom and locked the door, as if they thought Milo might try to come in.

That night Milo woke up in the middle of the dream. The clock said 3:30 and the sky was dark. The house slept like a man after a big dinner, a full drugged sleep. Milo went downstairs and outside into the pear orchard. The air was fragrant with pears, but it was too dark to see anything. Milo was aware of a specific presence, of something solid, of a spirit which inhabited the place, yet there was nothing supernatural about it. The spirit was small and quiet, like a low voice.

Milo sat down. Overhead, the night sky was devoid of stars, and on the far wall, moon flowers had opened their moist dewy faces. Milo went over and picked some of the moonflowers, which rained yellow pollen on his face and eyelashes. When his hands were full, he returned to the spot and waited for Reba. He was about to give up and go back inside, when Reba came. This time she opened her eyes and smiled and said his name. "Reba," Milo said, "I've been waiting so long."

He wanted to reach out and touch her but was afraid she would dissolve if he did. Her hair was braided and pinned up and the hem of her dress was touched with dew. The earth she lay on seemed lit from within. Then, while he watched, Reba stood up and brushed the dirt from her dress; he handed the moonflowers to her, and she curtsied. Hanging down from the nearest pear tree was a tendril of vine, which Reba took hold of as she began to dance, spiraling the vine around the tree trunk. She looked over her shoulder, and threw Milo a flower. Then she was gone.

Gently, gently, Milo called after her, "Reba," but he didn't really expect an answer, or want one. A shallow indentation marked the place where she had lain, and then that too disappeared. Milo understood why Reba had come: now that his father was home, he no longer needed her. And yet, unlike sometimes when he understood a thing, his wonder was not diminished. He let the flower Reba had given him fall on the ground, and then because it was almost morning, all of the flowers closed their faces. Back in his room, he dreamed about the Milky Way. □

JAMES APPLEWHITE

THE EMPORIUM

In my dream of forever, each soul
In its antique stall
Shared the living memorabilia
With others. Tobacco tins
From 1917, drawers of scarves,
The knives lost by boys by rivers,
Diamond-cut pendants of purest
Glass and the cloth of dresses more
Valuable for stains on flowers,
And satin's yellowing (in heaven,
Where nothing else changes)
Lit up the great hall.

Turn of the century
Glass negatives found in a trunk
Had printed a picnic with white
Shirts and straw boaters on the
Grass, fast receding into the endlessly
Ancient in the eyes of this choir,
Who currently singing savored the odor
Of rivers where articles altered
Like newsprint in sun, and
Daughters and sons yet to be born
Would afford new hoards
Of wood authentically aged
In that future coming true predictably
On that whole earth
Like one marvelous Pennsylvania.

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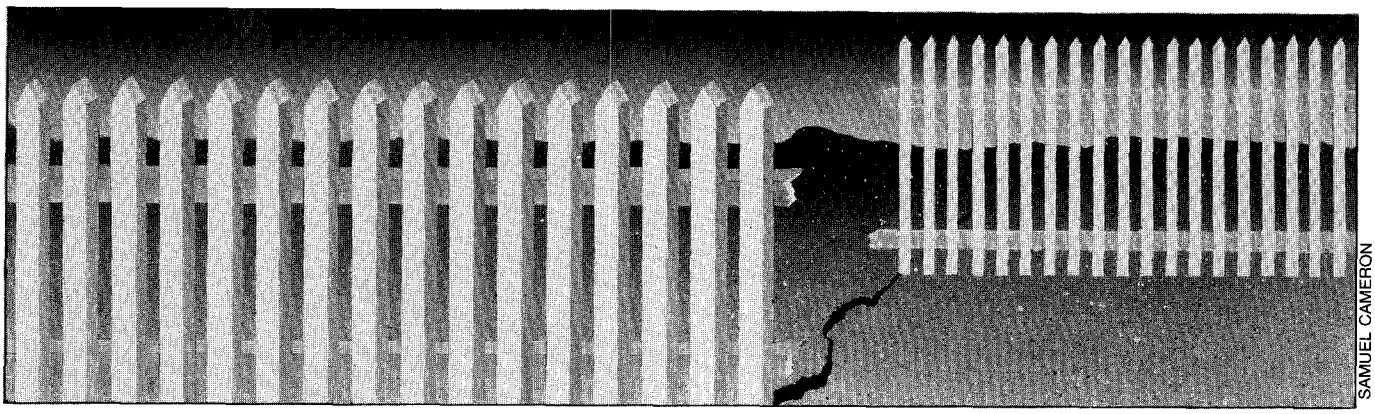
SAMUEL CAMERON

FAULT LINES

Rodger Kamenetz

A stranger was making eyes at Rhonda. She was three, bright and curious, and she said out loud, "Why is that man wearing lipstick?" Jacob thought of an answer, and the man giggled. He was fixing on Rhonda as though they were on the same wavelength, two little girls on a bus. Phyllis reached her arm around Rhonda between them and not so subtly squeezed Jacob's shoulder. That meant: You are the man. Do something. But what could he do? The bus was empty except for them.

"Let's move back," Jacob said. They picked themselves up awkwardly, Jacob pinching the blanket and picnic bag handles. Rhonda said, "Why do we have to move?" Jacob saw that the man's face tightened. Why, his feelings had been hurt. The unshaven hair below his lip glistened in the sunlight. The lipstick was very red. Jacob was relieved when the bus stopped in front of the Haight Hunan. The man swung around the pole.

"Driver," he called, "oh, driver, this is my stop." The driver shrugged and let him off.

A few blocks later the bus pulled over beside the park. End of the line. They were a little confused at first. Phyllis always said Jacob didn't know how to read a map. They'd picked one up from the car rental place the day before, and now Jacob was trying to match Stanyan Street with a thin blue line. Phyllis doubted there was a playground, no matter what the map said. "I haven't seen a child in three days. Are there any children in San Francisco?"

Phyllis was annoyed. Jacob had had what she called a mid-life crisis, a term he despised. It seemed to trivialize what he was feeling.

They were walking on a ridge that veered away from the traffic. The air was cool, and the sunshine bright, but all the vegetation seemed brittle and dry, just barely making it. Jacob heard kids shouting. He pointed his finger to a small black square on the map.

"The playground must be in the dell," he said. "Let's go down the path."

"There must be stairs," Phyllis said.

But he went ahead with Rhonda, and she followed, stumbling, clutching the root of a eucalyptus. He ran down the last few yards, with Rhonda on his shoulders. He felt some spring in his step. He was thirty-five.

Now they could see the playground. They passed a baseball diamond where some men he knew Phyllis would classify as rough characters were playing ball and drinking beer. They wore their shirts out over their jeans, and some of them needed a shave.

Jacob saw hundreds of kids. Some were wearing name tags, and a few teachers sat on benches. They weren't even trying to supervise. Rhonda got nervous as she always did in new situations, held back and clung to her mother's pants leg.

"Go on," she said, "Why don't you try the slides?" They were made of concrete with grooves cut in. Jacob saw three Chinese boys, brothers probably, slide down, cupped together. It looked like fun.

"Go on," Jacob said.

Rhonda toddled off. She measured a distance exactly half way between her parents and an elaborate wooden structure bursting with children. They crossed tire and chain bridges, climbed up and down ladders, slid down slides, peeked over perches, and yelled. There were Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics. It looked good to Jacob. That's what he liked about San Francisco, and what he hated about the suburbs of Atlanta. They were too uniform. He'd never liked Atlanta, even though Phyllis's people were from there.

"I'll take her in," Jacob said to Phyllis. "You can lie down if you like." Why did he always find himself being nice to her just when he was thinking his meanest thoughts?

He could see, with so many children, why the wooden structure might be scary to Rhonda. He led her up some stairs, and they crossed a tire and chain bridge together. He was the only adult on the structure and felt a little

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awkward. When they got to the slides, he said, "I'll leave you here, okay?" Rhonda wasn't sure. She called to him. "Help me down, Daddy."

They walked over to the fish pond. Jacob thought of what Phyllis had said the day before. They had driven across the Golden Gate bridge. They'd gotten a flashier car than they'd requested, a red Datsun ZX, and they all seemed to be in a good mood, crossing over the San Francisco Bay. They went to a small park, near Olema. It was where the great San Francisco earthquake had started. The ground had started splitting where they were standing. It looked ordinary enough now, just a patch of hill rising up from the beach, part of a farm property that had been made into a museum of the disaster. A white fence ran across a cow pasture. At one point there was a gap and the fence continued again, ten feet away. The shifting ground had moved one section away from the other.

Jacob read the plaque on a block of stone in front of the fence, while Rhonda and Phyllis walked over to the section that had moved. "Here's where it happened," Jacob called. "Right here. We're on either side of the fault line." Phyllis was looking all around. The landscape seemed to rattle her—the Pacific Ocean below, the sense of the ground that had shifted under their feet. She called to Jacob, "I simply don't know what we're doing here."

He didn't have an answer. There was something he was looking for although "something" seemed vague, especially at his age. He just didn't know what it was. Life had gotten too simple. Going in a straight line, rising up in the firm, had lost meaning for him. The other men seemed to have more conventional marriages, a nice wife at home taking care of the kids, standard stuff. He'd never wanted that. He liked it that Phyllis worked, only she seemed to take it more seriously than he did. Maybe he was having a mid-life crisis. But then, why didn't she have one too? She seemed so satisfied. He was scared of becoming boring.

Rhonda had taken her shoes off while he wasn't looking and was wading out into the fishpond. She was going to stumble on the rocks and break her head open. He called her back sharply. She looked puzzled.

He felt annoyed that Phyllis had gone off on her own. She always did that, left him to be father and mother at once. He got Rhonda to put her sandals back on, and they walked back to near where they'd entered. Phyllis was lying down on the blanket, sunning herself. She'd opened a couple of buttons on her blouse, and he could see the top of her breasts curving down.

"Taking a nap?" he said. He tried to sound neutral.

"San Francisco makes me tired. What happened, sweetie, did you get your feet wet?" She felt Rhonda's toes. Rhonda giggled and wandered off.

"We'll be here, honey," Jacob called to her. Phyllis closed her eyes. "I'll keep an eye on her."

Rhonda watched five kids, first graders, on a whirly round. Then she went on to some concrete pipes. She liked to go inside and just sit. She was maybe fifty yards away, but he could see her quite clearly.

She crawled into the pipe, and when she was about three quarters of the way through, he couldn't see her any more. He waited, sort of counting, and just at the right time, she emerged from the other end, and ran back.

Two white girls on the whirly round were teasing a Chinese girl. She was wearing a skirt and the other girls were wearing pants. They kept lifting her skirt, showing her panties to the boys. Jacob wondered why she didn't do something about it. But the Chinese girl went along with it, pulling down her skirt each time and then trying to go on as if nothing had happened. Finally she got mad and said something. The white girls laughed at her.

Where was Rhonda? She had entered the pipe. She was probably sitting just out of sight. Jacob waited a minute. This was a sunny day, a nice park in San Francisco. Kids, parents, teachers. In another ten seconds, Rhonda would emerge from the far end of the pipe. He would see her navy blue sweater, her red tights.

"Phyllis, I'm going to go over to see Rhonda."

"What's the matter?" she said, opening her eyes. She'd fallen asleep.

"Don't worry," he said, moving a little faster than he should have if nothing were wrong.

As he approached the concrete pipes, he felt ridiculous. He would see her. He'd been watching her closely. It was just a trick of perspective. The row of pipes blocked his vision. She was probably sitting behind one of them now.

When he came to the pipes, though, she was gone. He walked all around them, calmly at first, and then more quickly, looking into each one, and calling her name. Where could she have gone? A row of hedges divided the playground from the ball field. He noticed a gap in the hedge. Someone could have taken her through there. He stared out at the field. How fast could they have moved? He went back to the playground, swung his eyes around in circles, and looked in the pipes again. He already knew she wasn't there. He saw Phyllis sitting up now, looking at him. She didn't seem to understand what was going on. He ran towards her, stopped about twenty yards from her and shouted, "I can't find her."

Phyllis jumped up, leaving her handbag behind. They ran back towards the pipes, calling her name. The sound of panic in their voices scared him.

He ran up to a park attendant, an old Japanese man who was holding a rake. He had been working next to the concrete pipes.

"Did you see a little girl? In a blue sweater." He didn't answer. "I've lost her, don't you understand?" He shook his head and mumbled. He didn't speak English.

Phyllis was trying to explain to a couple of teachers that she had lost her daughter. They didn't get it. Everyone was too slow. It was as though she and Jacob were operating at twice their speed.

"I saw a kid in a blue sweater." An older girl was speaking.

"When?" Jacob said.

"Just a second ago."

"Where did she go?"

"Oh. It was a little boy."

Jacob scanned the playground, looking for the blue sweater, the dark hair, the red tights. He saw the whole park at once. He felt he could see every event that related

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to Rhonda, simultaneously. Those guys at the ballfield had kidnapped her, she was in a car with them right now, heading up Stanyan Street. Jacob was running through the park. He was waiting in the municipal police station downtown, the big white marble building. They could do nothing to help him. He was all alone in the city, putting up forlorn posters in grocery stores, hiring a detective. He pictured his whole life, revolving around the search for years. He would never stop looking for Rhonda.

Phyllis was beside him.

"How could you be so goddamned stupid?" she said. "How could you be so stupid?"

Didn't she understand that every second they wasted, Rhonda was getting further away? He felt so much at that moment he was choking.

"You're not helping," he said. "Nobody's helping."

"I hate you," she said. It felt like the truth.

He became aware of people standing in a circle around them. They were about ten feet from the pipes.

"Listen," one of them said, an older man in a Giants cap. "What's the problem?"

"They've lost their kid," somebody else said. It sounded like they'd lost their umbrella.

Jacob hated them. "Rhonda, Rhonda, Rhon—da!" he shouted, in three directions, walking briskly. He was registering every detail in the park. There was no perspective. Everything was close to him. Two kids were standing up in a swing. An old man in a beret was picking up a bocce ball. They had clear outlines around them. The little Chinese girl he had noticed earlier was rubbing her eyes and talking to her teacher, a black woman in a white blouse with a name tag on her breast. How could he be seeing all this, and not seeing Rhonda?

He began to run. Behind him, the man in the baseball cap was scratching his head. "A red skirt you said?" "No," Phyllis was saying. Even though he was thirty yards away, he felt he was standing right beside her.

A crazy whine was running through him. He was about to cry. He felt his heart splitting in two, great chunks of it tearing off and falling into a hole. He ran to the opposite end of the park towards the petting zoo. Rhonda could not have gotten over that way without his seeing her. But there was nowhere else in the playground to look.

She was sitting at the fish pond. She'd taken her shoes off again and was splashing her toes in the water. "Rhonda," he said as he came up to her. "Didn't you hear me calling?"

"Yes," she said quietly. She wasn't worried a bit.

"Why didn't you answer?"

"I did answer, like this. I said, 'I'm here, Daddy.' "

Now Phyllis was with them. She grabbed Rhonda and gave her a hug. He looked at them from the side. He had imagined himself searching for Rhonda, alone. As if it were glamorous.

"I'm sorry," Phyllis said. "I was groggy and uh I . . . " She shook her head. "I didn't know what was going on. It wasn't your fault," she added.

"It was all my fault," Jacob said. He felt drained. He was glad he had found Rhonda. Why did he feel slightly disappointed, all the same? □

DEB CASEY

12 OCTOBER

August 6 1945 17 seconds
after 8:15 Hiroshima
is obliterated Yesterday
league standings set right wing I pushed
the cross across an easy goal
I scored against nonexistent
opposition 3000 miles
off my grandma died white white world small
fetal ball reduced and gathered 14 long
black shadow years at last *I will die*
I had no breath At the net No sound
at the center The moment The push
In Nagasaki the children died at their desks
". . . I never see such hurt
on people . . . no eyes" Black rain
the size of marbles fell Men left
their shadows standing *My father*
would hold me The funeral
I cannot attend Into the skin
the patterns of the women's kimonos burned:
bud branch The hands
3000 miles Trailing
shadows shoulders feet her skin sleeps slips
when touched off like a glove or nylon
stocking The ball rolls
into the net My father closes
the bedroom door I've never
seen him cry.

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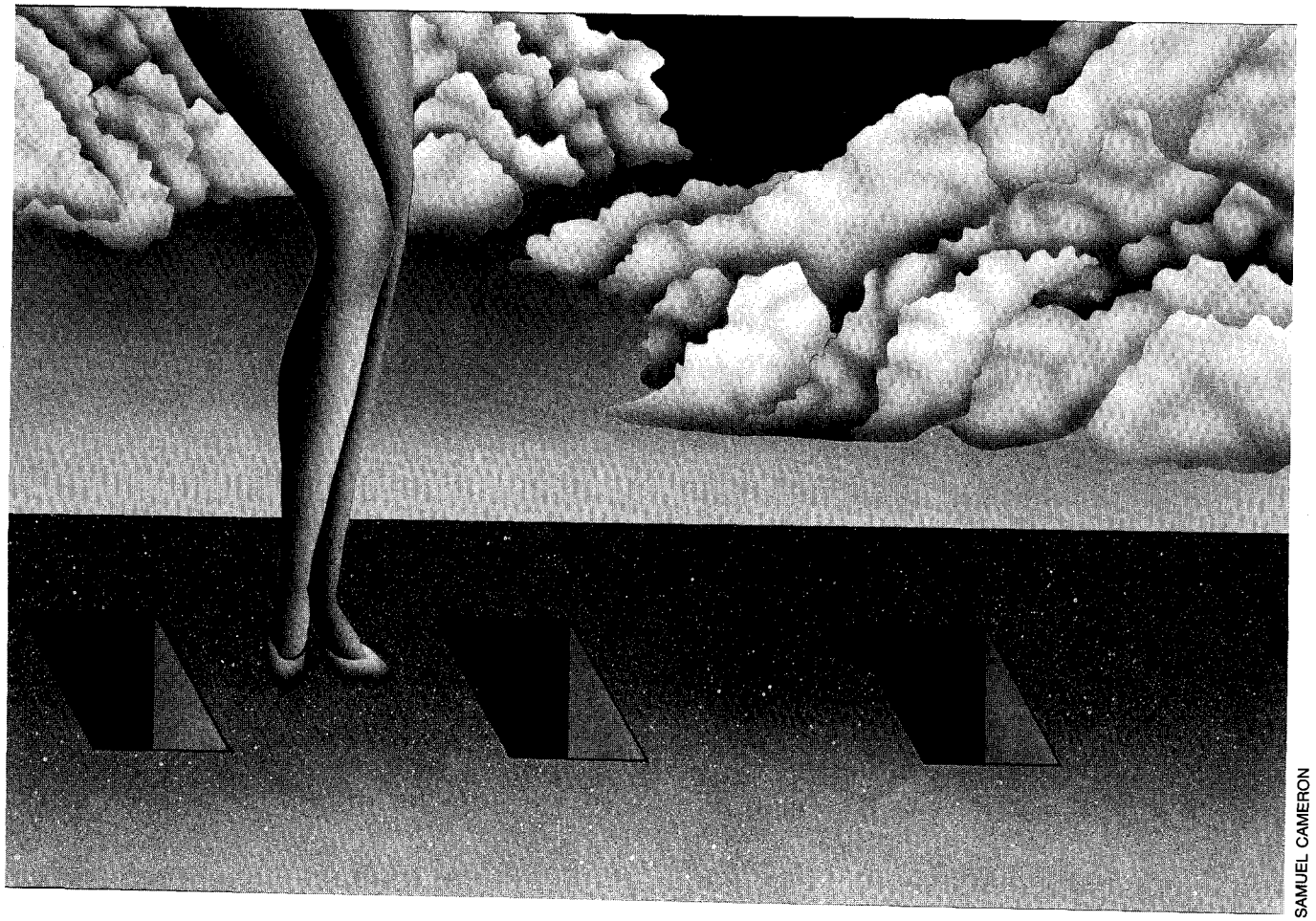

SAMUEL CAMERON

WEATHER REPORT

Roberta Metz Swann

Norris wandered into Lampston's for nothing in particular. She wore a tank top patterned with her face, and a pair of flaring khaki shorts. Flexing a thigh muscle, she picked up two eggs full of pantyhose and browsed. A saleslady tipped after on eraser soles.

"May I help you?" she asked unpleasantly. Her eye shadow was the color of pool paint, giving her that just-dead look.

"Not really," Norris smiled. "I was just going to put these into my purse." Pivoting, she dropped the eggs in a nest of sale items, passed through the check-out and left a heavy trail of Joy behind. She loved starting the day with discord. She loved chocolate. And bit into the nutty bar she'd just palmed:

A heist of empty virtuosity, Norris shrugged. But sugar gave her access to a more energetic state of consciousness. Rocket fuel, she rationalized. A quick spiritual fix. She cheered herself with another bite and swung her portfolio defiantly into the midday crowd. Two drunks tumbled into formation behind her.

"Hey, she so fine. Look at that tan. Like a jar of honey. Bet she never had a brother like me. She never need another man."

Amused, Norris considered the doubtful boast and noticed how bums always travel in pairs, like nuns. Advancing through a construction site, she tailed a girl in shimmering slacks that sawed her backside into fours, who was painting her nails on the run. In the clearing, a hardhat dangled his legs from a girder, singing like a Garland from a stage.

"Hey lady, you look *so* fuckable," he called as she passed. Norris ground to a stagey halt.

"You guys talk *so* big," she scowled, leaving him squeezing his beer can. She was right. Grinning good-naturedly, he lifted his Michelob in a modest toast.

"No time like the past," he laughed, clapping his buddy on the back. And went back to work.

"Hey, man. That's cool."

"Darlin, you're late, late, late," Duncan snapped like a rubberband. She wondered if he called her *darlin* because he forgot her name? Darting back and forth, Duncan checked the two watches he wore on his wrist and dragged in a rack of designer knockoffs.

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"Undress for action, sweetiepie," he clapped.

"Clap, clap," Norris clapped behind the silkscreen where she disrobed and slipped into a Japanese fishprint full of holes where arms could select a combination of any two.

The studio filled with a surplus of sound: rock, electronic, Motown, gospel, famous speeches from the 'sixties and fragments from I Love Lucy. Norris dreamed over her mascara until Duncan's walky-talky beamed her back.

"Earth to Norris," he repeated and came at her with the wind machine that played cat and mouse in her very blonde hair. Duncan scrutinized her through his lens . . . and shook his head. "Needs a little breastwork." Norris thought the dress. But Duncan dipped into the ice bucket and rubbed a cube over her nipples, tightening each into a nailhead. Planned spontaneity. The music reached a frenetic pitch. Duncan shot little parachutes of encouragement into her ear:

Look like you want it.
But not from him.
Look like you had it.
And want more.
Squirm with impatience.
You affect him.
He loves when you call him names.
He depends on it.
"Piggy."
"Chill it darlin or we'll be selling tires in Cleveland."

Norris did a quick-change into a steamy jungle print. Duncan tossed over two chains.

"Belt?"

"Earrings!" he gave her a demented grin. And switched the tape to Twisted Sister. She moved like a snake dancing on a stick. Duncan ambushed her from every angle. She was really cooking and they had the inside track. A strap slid off her shoulder. "Bad thing," he teased, and got the disapproving look he was after. The camera said she was nature's finest, a tree with just the right amount of branches and leaves. But it was the next-to-nothings that paid the rent.

Modelling was Norris's churchwork. And deliverance was a thousand bucks an hour. She was worth every cent, Duncan confessed. Still he wished he could shoot the lingerie layout at the cemetery.

Dead tired, Norris bailed out. It was dusk. The hour of the wolf. Hoisting her gear bag onto a shoulder, she stopped into a convenience store, bought a Tab and stole a jar of macadamia nuts. Norris never purchased one thing without pilfering another. She returned the clerk's admiring smile with the full force of hers.

Norris scouted around for a taxi. Suddenly, a lady in a large hat sailed full tilt into traffic, screaming: I hate rich people, poor people, kids, God, Dr. Goodman. I hate Dr. Goodman's slimey face. I guess I'm totally paranoid," she admitted to the honking cars. The only thing that stopped was an Oriental businessman. He took pictures. The woman flapped her elbows, chicken style. She climbed on the hood of a gridlocked van. A boy in bitesize Adidas bolted to her rescue, falling on the occasion on one knee, and gallantly offered his hand, blighting another New York Post headline: ANGRY CROWD YELLS JUMP. A cab slowed into the curb and Norris bunny-dipped inside. She was smiling. Her kind of man.

The swank building Norris occupied rose like a monumental Dunhill lighter on Park Avenue. The doorman tipped his hat. It was easier than opening the door. He delivered the news in an insincerely sorry voice that sounded like Tonto's.

"Air conditioner's broke."

Norris pulled a face, then noticed a fan on the reception desk.

"May I borrow your fan?"

"Only one I have."

"That's OK," she said and snatched it up.

There was a stranger on the elevator. It was so nice to see a stranger. He gave her a keen look. There was something about him, an eye that floated . . . A woman pushed a pram through the closing doors. The baby was wearing a Walkman.

"Keeps him quiet," she offered.

The child started to scream.

"Pee pee or poo poo Jonathan?"

They exited on six.

"Not much of a multiple choice," Norris laughed.

His eyes looked into hers until she let go of his gaze. He edged closer and took her face into his two hands. She moved into his arms.

"I'm married," she managed.

"I'm not jealous."

They took the elevator down. Love at first sight? Norris was good and ready.

"I won't be needing this," she informed the doorman and left him holding the fan.

They passed a restaurant called Pisces. He wondered if they served fish. She told him before 1850 there was no right or left shoes. Both feet fit the same. They sat in the park. Norris's heart pumped ten speeds. He took out a pen and wrote his telephone number on her knee, grocery list style:

53
38
70
5
166.

and added it up for camouflage.

"Call me."

"What shall I call you?"

"David. David Van Winkle. After my father. And after his."

Norris was happy, a heliotrope altered by light. She felt an edgy joy. And hardly stole a thing. Falling into the morning mirror, her face was plump with sleep but undeniably lovely. Usually she saw a blank medal that lost its inscription. She stepped out of the frame and waited impatiently for the shower.

Why in this day of hip and hardswinging music was her husband singing O Sole Mio? His voice irritably conjured up crazy Aunt Mary who deedle-deedle-doo-ed her life away, who wanted to live in the LaSalle Funeral Home

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because the velvet decor was so up-to-date, and who didn't know you had to be dead because *funeral* sounded so much like *carnival.*

It was Norris's mother Marcelle who underwrote the affair. She called it sinning for good and believed the only positive point about marriage was that it made adultery possible.

Norris padded into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. The phone rang. She picked up.

"Try to conceal your disappointment at the sound of my voice. How is the darling man?"

"I'm fine mother. Just came out of a damn good shower," her husband chirped, making it a conference call. Norris watched two flies perform aerialist feats. One nosedived into the strawberry jam. A happy death.

Everything at home was different. But nothing really changed.

"I'm tired," her husband yawned.

"Have an English muffin."

"I'm hungry."

"Go to bed."

Shuffle, shuffle, kick, kick, kick. She danced the dance Daddy taught her. Daddy who told her scratch-sheet stories and gave her panties that said the days of the week, who lifted her circle skirt and joked: Wednesday already?

The day she robbed Tiffany's it was raining. She planned to meet David outside but a lopsided heart caught her eye. Browsing, she picked the heart inconspicuously off its velvet tray and clasped it around her neck. A diamond chip flickered larcenously inside her collar-bone. The salesman was occupied. She made motions for his attention only for effect. Then strolled, stopped to soothe a tired child, fell into a conversation with a tourist, picked a hair off the inside of her wrist, practicing the zen of shoplifting.

David surprised her from behind. He massaged her neck until she relaxed. Her hand stilled in his. Norris navigated him toward the exit. As they passed through the doors, an alarm went off.

Security struck. A pulse beat in Norris's eyelid. David dodged and fled. A uniformed guard led her to a back room. His profile was cut like a key. With an undersea feeling, she sat down.

"Our jewelry, Miss."

She clutched her neck. It was bare.

"It's possible that it's not possible," a consensus of management agreed. The best-dressed of the lot stepped forward.

"Sometimes an ID will trigger the inventory-control device. Please understand and accept our apologies."

She did. David had stolen her heart. Again.

Sunlight punched in and out of clouds in tandem with the hammer in her head. As she walked down the avenue, Norris thought he stood smiling in the distance but the sun—the sun was in her eyes. □

RICHARD KATROVAS

ONE

Let's go, little passion, this room's got grief,
And all my books and pens are bored with me.
We'll take a twilight walk and look around.
Come inside, little passion, come inside.

For I have known what other men have known
And, like them, have feared for knowing more.
As shattered nerves prick blood from bloodless thoughts,
Easing into traffic draws thoughts from thought,

And time felt cools knowing down to nothing.
One dirty pane of glass divides two hearts
Where one's scared that the other's scared of him.
One dirty pane of glass divides the world.

The woman I love is out for a while.
The street, grey baby, sings for you and me.
Find your creaky door to my affections.
Come inside, little passion, come inside.

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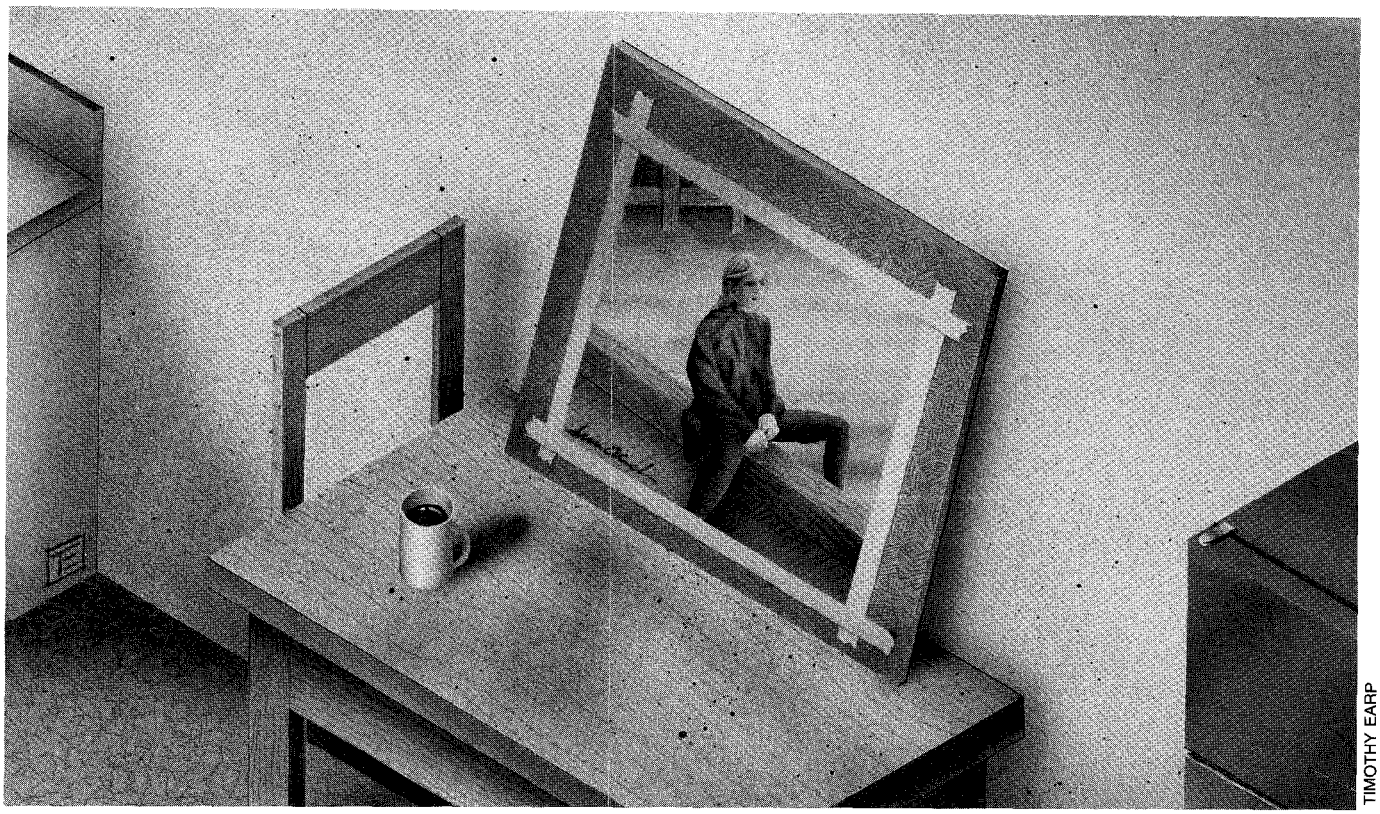

TIMOTHY EARP

EL AMOR NO TIENE ORGULLO

Sandra J. Kolankiewicz

My husband wants to make love with you, the Algerian woman told her in Spanish. You will not, will you?

They were standing in knee-deep water in front of the Algerian woman's hotel. The woman held a chubby son, Marco, on her boney hip, and he pulled the ends of her long, tight curls.

Patricia tried to read the eyes behind the woman's smoked sunglasses. They seemed calm and assured.

But I've never met your husband, she said. In all of the days I have talked with you here, I've never seen him.

The woman bent, splashed a handful of water onto her son's shoulder, and rubbed it in. Some of it slithered down her forearm to her elbow and trickled into the salt water around them. She shifted her weight and her son at the same time to her other hip, then wet his back, caressing it.

He has seen you running, she said. She laughed quietly. It is enough for him.

It was late afternoon and the sun was less aggressive. The bare-breasted women were gone; the season was over. Still it seemed a perpetual summer. Change was the coming and going of regular rain and the ebb and flow of foreign visitors on their vacations.

Patricia had taken to visiting the woman on the beach while she waited for the Cuban to return from fishing. After talking with the Algerian woman for awhile, she would take off running toward her cabaña a half mile away, pumping and pumping through ankle-deep water until her stride was a fluid movement and she found her rhythm, fixed her breathing. She would gallop through the water, splashing it up her legs, the blue channel stretching tranquilly beside her, and watch her white cabaña at the end of the beach by the lighthouse float closer and closer.

I do not know if he will approach you, the woman was saying. But I wanted that you know.

When Patricia looked at her again, she was smiling.

Did he tell you this? she asked the woman. She turned and surveyed the nearly-deserted beach. Calypso music floated from the open-air restaurant tucked into the shade under a giant palapa.

The woman smiled again and tried to lift her son from her hip to dunk him lightly into the cool water, but he squealed and clung to her neck, his eyes popping tears, saliva drooling over his bottom lip.

Chhh, Chhh, Chhh, she said and jiggled him up and down until he stuck his fingers in his mouth. She turned to Patricia.

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He painted a picture of you, she told her, still rocking the baby.

Patricia planted her hands on her hips and stared down at her thighs, where they met the water. The day had been hot and terribly humid. She could smell the brine of her own sweat.

Would you like to see the painting? asked the woman. Without waiting for an answer, she started to move back to shore, her strides rippling the water around them. Her son reached back over her shoulder at Patricia and pawed the air.

I think what he did with your hair is perfect, said the woman. She closed the hotel-room door behind her and set the baby down in the middle of the tile floor. She turned the knob for the overhead fan and it started slowly, then whipped itself round and round. The room was bright, clean but cluttered, and she crossed it back and forth, shuffling newspapers, making piles of rumpled clothes. There was a shiny silver flute on a rusting music stand in the corner. The baby began to whine and pull himself along the floor.

Patricia stood by the door, her body oiled and glistening, and stared at the painting. The water-color was taped to a large pressed-board square, and set on the kitchen table. It leaned back against a creme-colored wall.

In the painting, the figure of Patricia wearing her green and white bathing suit ran down the beach at sunset, holding the fiery weight of the sun out before her in her palm as she ran. There were flaming streaks in her hair, and her body was a puzzle of spheres. The water that stretched out behind her was striped blues, meeting the clouds at a horizon that glowed yellow and red.

But the most compelling element in the painting was the face. The eyes were lightly closed to the ball of power in the hand, and the mouth was smiling.

Immediately Patricia felt attracted to the man. She turned from his image of her to his wife.

It is something, is it not? asked the woman. I think it is very powerful.

Patricia crossed the room to sit on a plastic-covered chair. Her sticky thighs clung to the seat. She looked at the woman, then back at the painting.

I'm sorry, she said.

The Algerian woman laughed and made a hopeless gesture with her hand. She scooted into the kitchen after the baby, and set him in the middle of the floor with a pile of crackers.

Patricia looked at the painting again, and then away, out the window. Three floors down there were people mixing on the beach. The windows were polarized and their light was cool.

This is not the first time, the woman was saying, sitting down on the floor beside her son, playing with his black curls. He has had many women since his work became famous. In Paris he was an alley cat.

Where is he now? asked Patricia. She had been watching the woman's lips move around a language that was native to neither of them. The woman was in her mid-thirties and was still beautiful, with a fine nose and high forehead. When she braided her thick black hair, the braids held together at the ends by themselves.

He is with Beto, said the woman. That is the son of his first marriage.

That is the boy you were with yesterday? asked Patricia, looking again at the painting.

The woman shook her head. The baby grabbed at her leg.

No, that was Tito, she said. He is the son from the second marriage. She placed her hand on Marco's head and slipped her fingers between the shiny curls. We are the third that he has married.

Why do you stay with him? asked Patricia, looking at the woman's hands. The fingers were long and thin. It was her silver flute on the stand in the corner.

The woman laughed and hugged her son to her thigh. She picked a piece of cracker up off the floor and handed it to him, placed it in his wet hands.

I stay with him because I love him. She smiled at Patricia. *El amor no tiene orgullo.* There are some men who can never be satisfied by one woman. He needs to believe in the kind of love that does not exist. If he suspected how practical love really is, he would despair.

Love is not a decision, Patricia said lamely.

For me, said the woman, it is more important to love than to be loved. I need to love.

REG SANER

IF SPACE WERE CURVED

If space were curved
wouldn't everything happen
all the time? These stars
at noon, colored fires
in snow. And the man
wearing a ginger beard
while mining the ice age
at the far end
of his core sample —
isn't he bound to discover
this dark buttercup
just getting ready
to open? The child
he was, touching
his grandmother's jungle
of housebroken fern
before she had children,
touching her cool young
womanhood, stored up
as white ashes.

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Patricia looked again at the painting.

He has slept with her, said the painter's wife. She nodded with her eyes at a table they were passing.

A woman sat alone, blonde kinky hair and a low-cut man's T shirt, smoking a filterless cigarette. She watched them pass from the corner of her eye, her profile perfect in the light from the restaurant.

They passed her without saying anything more.

He only likes beautiful women, said the painter's wife at the corner. And they never know what to do with me. She smiled at Patricia. I am so nice.

They continued up the sand street, past the long distance telephone office, a cantina, the panadería, until they reached the Zocalo. It was nearly deserted. They plopped themselves down on a bench in front of an alamendra tree. Patricia wiped at her face with the end of her skirt.

And what of your Cuban? asked the Algerian woman.

Patricia stretched her legs out in front of her and pulled down on the hem, where the material was fraying.

I don't understand it, she said. He comes to see me twice a day, spends every night with me, but he does not give me what I need. He is a body, no more. He holds something from me.

The painter's wife reached, picked up a corner of Patricia's skirt and began to play with the frayed hem, folding it as if she were going to repair it.

And you? she asked Patricia. Are you waiting for him to give you everything first? She folded the hem further along where it was just beginning to unravel.

Patricia watched her slender fingers.

We are waiting for each other, she said. It is ridiculous. But I know he feels proud to be with me.

The woman laughed and dropped the material.

Are you proud to be with the Cuban? she asked. She was not looking at Patricia. Instead, she watched a Mayan woman pedal a cart topped with peeled oranges out of the square. The woman had long greying braids hanging in a pair down her back.

Yes, said Patricia.

Wait for me, said the Algerian woman. She stood up, fished in the pocket of her skirt for some coins, then chased after the Mayan woman. Patricia saw her catch the woman at the edge of the Zocalo, drop a handful of coins into her palm, and choose six oranges. She held them in her skirt and trotted back across the center.

Here, she said, and handed one to Patricia. She sat down again, the oranges piled in her lap, and picked one out for herself.

The others are for my family, she said.

Patricia separated the sections and made flower designs on both of her thighs, then began to eat their petals, spitting out the seeds in front of her.

If you feel pride in the one you love, then you are in love with a reflection of yourself, how this person makes you look, she was told. *El orgullo te engaña*, pride tricks you. She sucked the seeds out of an orange slice and spit them delicately into her palm.

Patricia sighed.

The first time I made love with the Cuban, he left saying that he would come right back, she said. I did not see him for three days and then he did not apologize. He just presented himself one night and expected me to let him in.

Did you?

Patricia laughed grudgingly. I let him in and he left at dawn to fish for lobster. When he came back to my cabaña, he had an extra pair of pants and some shirts. He did not ask me if he could move in, he just did it.

It is difficult for some men to ask, said the woman. She played with the oranges in her lap, lifting her skirt and rolling them back and forth across her thighs.

Patricia looked at her impatiently.

You make excuses for selfishness, she said. There is something wrong with me. I am in love with an egotist.

The woman looked up at her in surprise.

You have to tell him what it is you need, she said. If he cannot give it to you, you must go. It is that simple.

But you! said Patricia. How can you say that when your husband has so many lovers and leaves you alone?

Before them in the Square a group of soldiers left the government building to make rounds on the beach.

The woman folded her oranges into her lap.

I have made my needs very small, she said.

Patricia was dancing alone in the sand to a scratchy reggae, a plastic cup filled with Kahlúa in her hand. She swirled her skirt with the frayed hem around her with the other hand and moved her hips softly to the even beat. Couples danced beside her.

I'm tired of it, she had told the Algerian woman when they parted. I'm going to drink and dance by myself.

But now she felt foolish dancing alone. She knew that the Cuban was canvassing the sand streets on his motorcycle, looking for her.

She spun, twisting her skirt, and when she faced again the direction where she had started, she was surprised to find that she had a partner. The man was wearing white pants that tied at the ankles and at the waist, and a white baggy shirt with wide sleeves, stitched with red X's around the collar. He smiled at Patricia and nodded.

You dance well! he called loudly over the music.

Her rhythm was affected. She stepped to the side and bumped into someone. The drink she was holding spilled out, onto her skirt, into the cool sand. The man in the white pants pulled her by the arm from the dance floor. He steered her to a table outside in the sand, and reached for a handful of napkins.

I can do it, she said in Spanish, She took the napkins from him and began to blot the brown stain from her white skirt.

It will come out with bleach, said the man, in English. You should watch where you are dancing.

She kept scrubbing. He waited until she laid the wet napkins on the table, then gestured toward a seat. She remained standing. He held out his hand.

My name is Uvat, he said.

She shook his hand loosely and looked at his dark, thin face. His bottom lip was wet, shiny, and full.

I have seen you running, he said. □

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Gloria

DAVID HELLERSTEIN

Even the junkies are gone from the park this morning. The warm rain whips through the old trees outside my office window, the fat ailanthus, the blacktrunked maples, and the hot Caribbean wind tears leaves off, blows loose newspapers so they stick on the high wrought iron fence that surrounds the park before being shredded, disappearing. Huddled in doorways of abandoned buildings, hopping turnstiles at Union Square, going underground, the junkies will wait it out, I suppose. Nothing can kill them. I drink my coffee, read the *Times*. The Resident-On-Call, who's supposed to come for Debriefing first thing every morning, hasn't shown. I could page him, I suppose, but I don't.

I wait.

All week we've been waiting for Gloria, the hurricane, that fall convulsion of the atmosphere, watching the fat weatherman gesticulate on Channel 4, a black-and-gray whirl of clouds behind him. At first Gloria hovered off the coast of Florida, then she launched herself at twenty m.p.h. up the East Coast, then she hit land in Carolina, smashing houses, driving citizens to cots in gymnasiums and armories, her hundred-mile winds ripping roofs off, downing power lines. Every day the weatherman has plotted the possible trajectories—she might veer inland, spinning off tornadoes as she loses velocity, and degenerate into a storm. Or blow out to sea and end up in the North Atlantic, baffling polar bears. Or—as she does—bear straight down on us.

This is a season of disasters. The very sky has turned vicious. Downdrafts knock huge jets out of the air, killing everyone. Earthquakes, droughts, mudslides, plagues—every morning on the IRT the *Post* screams the latest calamity. Today we are the news.

Last night, in the rain, my wife and I brought in trees—a Norfolk pine, two big pots of palms—from the terrace, put them, dripping, on newspapers by the French doors, surprised how much they'd grown since we put them out in May. This morning we debated what to do. Schools everywhere were closed. Businesses too. Should we stay home? It's supposedly the worst one of the century, I said. Wind rattled our old windows, our skylight shivered. Over the rooftops and watertanks, the sky was mustard-yellow. I'm going in, my wife said. Stay away from construction sites, I said, a lot of debris will be blowing around. Okay, she said, kissing me. She left. Finally I put on jeans, hiking boots, a raincoat, and ran for the subway; it's safer, I suppose, to be in a hospital than in a flimsy rooftop apartment.

My morning patients have canceled. And most of the other doctors have called to say they're not coming in. There's no one to cover Walk-In this afternoon, Sandy, the receptionist, says when I come out around ten. What about the Residents? I say. They're taking a test, she says, you'll have to cover. Oh, I say. Well, I'm sure there won't be any patients on a day like this.

I go back to my office and wait. The sky is darkening.

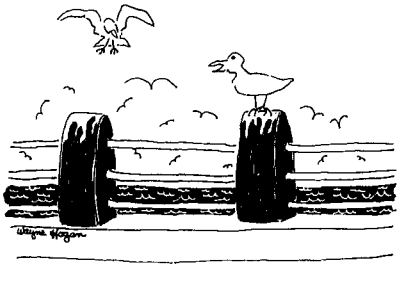
My wife phones. I'm going home, she says.

Home? I say. It's supposed to be here any minute.

They're about to turn off the power in our building, she says. She sighs. Anyway, it's supposed to hit Long Island, not us. I'm worried about the house.

I know, I say. So'm I.

I've got to go, she says. It's now or never.



Is the subway running? I say.

Of course. Don't be ridiculous.

Okay. See you later.

Okay.

When it's really roaring outside, the Residency Applicant arrives. A batch of them are scheduled every week, and I've been conscripted into being an interviewer. I guess even a hurricane couldn't keep them away.

He sits down, looking nervous.

So, I say, tell me about yourself.

You can't even see the trees, it's so dark. Gloria is near.

What we're really worried about, of course, is the house on the Island. The '38 hurricane submerged the entire barrier island, one in '63 washed most of the dunes away. But this one's bigger, faster, stronger than '38 or '63. Since Monday we've been trying to reach Bill, the caretaker, a year-round resident, a bit of a hermit, who watches over the village. We've called the Brookhaven police, the ferry company, the Coast Guard—all of whose phones rang and rang, unanswered. Finally last night we got through.

They're about to evacuate us, Bill said, I've been running around like a madman.

Could you do two things? my wife said. Close the shutter on the bay side, you know, the big heavy one. And make sure the clerestory window in the living room is open a crack?

I'll try, said Bill, I'll try.

After she hung up, I said, do you think we should have asked him to turn the power off? If the wires come down . . .

We both worry about fire.

My wife called him back, but there was no answer.

I was so stupid, I said. I should have taken the TV antenna down last weekend.

Well, it's too late now, my wife said.

This summer, to our surprise, we've gone out there ten weekends. I don't

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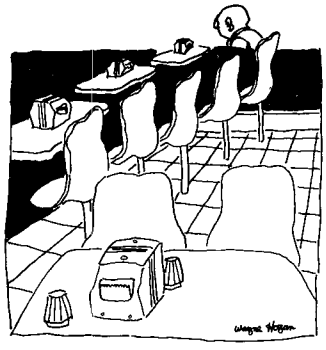
even like the beach that much. I get bored lying in one place, going running on the same stretch of sand, either left, up to the next community, or right, down to the national forest. No movies, no tennis or bicycling, no decent restaurants. Just the water, the sand, the sun, the bodies. We're not exactly part of the social scene either. Not to mention the exquisite torture of getting there and back: the gridlock of the Long Island Expressway or the repulsive crowds in Penn Station. Three hours plus each way.

But there's no question we've become attached to the house. Twice in the past five years, we've stained the parched old siding with gallons of gray linseed oil. We've scraped the trim and painted it white. We've replaced most of the outside decking. We arranged for a carpenter friend to put on new roofing and a new stove pipe, and to rebuild the downstairs room. Every spring we go around with hammers, knocking in nails that the winter-swollen wood has squeezed out, we get handfuls of new nails, look for loose boards on the walk and pound away to our hearts' content. On the ocean side the damage is always worst—windows leak, must be puttied, screens melt away in the salt air, steel hinges on the shutters, bright and new one year, rust through the next. We rip away the old broken hinges and butterflies, screw new ones into the splintery plywood, spray everything rusty with WD40, wash salt off the windows with a hose—like you'd do on a boat. Inside we sweep up the sand that blew in through cracks in the walls, we put out ant-traps, swipe cobwebs, fix faucets and toilets, pull damp blankets out of the closet and spread them over chairs to dry—hard old mothballs clattering away over the floor. This year our big project, finished just two weeks ago, was to repaint the entire living room.

We make coffee in the old salt-pitted percolator, we sit out on the deck, in bright sunlight, the *Times* yellowing before our very eyes, and when we're completely drenched in sweat we go down to the beach. We always bring work from the city; we almost never do it. Before we know it the weekend's up, and I'm outside again, closing the shutters, pulling the deck furniture inside, and Lisa's sweeping up and closing the blinds. We pile our luggage on the rusted old red wagons, and pull them down the walk and along the boardwalk, hurrying for the ferry, for the city.

This year was different, though. Over the winter my wife's grandfather died. An architect, he bought the house and three beach-front lots thirty years ago from a Canadian—a tiny prefab cottage ordered from a Sears, Roebuck catalog. He rebuilt it



with a slanted roof, a deck all around, and later added several small bedrooms downstairs, building flimsily, cheaply, not to last, but giving the house an airy modernity, a pleasantly informal, casual openness. Through the spring his ashes—in a small can that might hold English toffee—sat in our front closet. On a very bright, clear Saturday afternoon in August, we brought them out to the Island, and the entire family stood on the dunes in front of the house, saying a few words of remembrance, shedding some tears. Then everyone reached into the can for handfuls of ashes—hard, dry, dusty as gravel, as seashells—and scattered them over the dunes. The small can was passed around twice, then my father-in-law shook it out, empty, and we walked up over the dune to the house. Now he'll be here forever, my wife said. We had lunch and sat looking out at the beach, at the bright umbrellas, the bright naked bodies, the crashing surf. We watched our nephew Alex, age one, the fourth generation to use the house. He was learning to walk on the deck outside. He was picking up rocks and shells, squealing with delight, falling down.

When I come out of the Resident Applicant Interviewer lunch, the wind and rain have stopped. There's a deathly stillness to the warm air. Everything feels overheated, pressurized. At the reception desk, Sandy's turned a radio on.

What is this? I say. Are we in the eye?

No, Sandy says. It's gone.

Can't be, I say. That was . . . was hardly anything.

They say that's all there is, Sandy says. Oh, by the way, there's a patient in the Emergency Room, an old man who had twenty-five dogs in his apartment. His floor rotted through from all their mess. Are you going to see him?

I sigh. I guess so, I say. I'll tell you in a minute.

I go to my office. Across the street I see a dirty man standing by the water fountain, washing himself off. There are many broken branches on the ground, and drifts of green leaves, and soggy garbage is strewn all around. Some wet-looking junkies have begun filtering back in, appearing from nowhere, congregating around park benches in their dark knots. A shirtless man is pissing on the side of a tree. Later, on the bus uptown, other than a thousand X'es of masking tape on store windows and apartment windows—a mad tic-tac-toe—and an unearthly brightness, a freaky clarity of sky, and a few broken trees, nothing has changed in the city.

All weekend we try to reach Bill. We anxiously watch the News, hoping for a glimpse of the house as cameras pan along the beach. We try the police department and the Coast Guard again. We put our trees back out on the terrace, and sweep up debris blown from higher buildings.

The city was spared, but Gloria scraped right over the middle of Long Island. Power lines are down all over, won't be back up for a week at best. Perhaps half a dozen people have died—electrocuted, drowned. The trains are not running past Babylon, trees block all roads. And that is only Long Island; there is nothing about Fire Island—nobody seems to have gotten there yet.

Saturday night, with some friends, we take a boat ride around lower Manhattan, and see the city still bathed in a glorious tropical brightness. We dance to a live band on the booming deck. Later, in celebration, we go to Tribeca, to a black-and-white giraffe-spotted restaurant with a Statue-of-Liberty crown rising over the roofline. Lost in the garlicky smoky air, the glittering ceiling, the broken-tile-encrusted walls, the shaved temples and the dyed hair of the post-punk crowd, we drink to Gloria—turquoise-blue margaritas from a flask that you hold high overhead, a blue streaming arc that splashes you when the waiters rush by.

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Wednesday Jill comes in from Long Island with her four month old baby. No electricity yet, she tells us. Hundred year old trees are down everywhere. She's been nursing in darkness all week.

Thursday we reach Bill.

He doesn't recognize me at first. I say my wife's name.

Oh, yes, of course, he says. Oh, I just went up by the ocean walk . . .

Yes?

And you're fine.

No damage?

I didn't get very close. But nothing big. One of your shutters blew off. And the power lines are down everywhere.

Otherwise we're okay?

Yes.

I sigh. How's everything else?

You know the big red house that looks like a barn? It completely lost its roof. Another house—the one with the breezeway, the one that looks like two shoeboxes—half of it got blown away. Compared to the Pines, we got off easy, though. Lots of house damage there.

How are the dunes? Did they get washed away?

Bill laughs. Not at all. In fact we got a lot of new sand, they're built up quite a bit. I think a good part of Westhampton blew onto our dunes.

I laugh.

You coming out?

Next weekend, I think, I say.

No need to rush, he says.

There's no question but that I've always loved storms. When I was a kid in Ohio, we used to get tornadoes every fall, and I remember the thrill of turning off all the lights, leaving windows a crack open, hiding at the leeward end of the house as you waited for the wind to whip up—and the exhilaration one year when part of the apple tree got knocked through the house, a whole branch heavy with sweet apples landing on the breakfast room table. Another time, coming back from Kelley's Island, in the middle of Lake Erie, with the whole family and our car on a ferry, a storm came up, and the boat began rolling back and forth in the whitecaps of that shallow, tempestuous lake, and we were afraid the cars would break loose and smash through the sides of the boat, drowning everyone. And when I was sixteen, there was the best storm of all. Another boy, Ned, who I hardly knew, and I took a group of about eight 12- and 13-year-old boys up Mount Washington. The weather turned bad as we left our camp at 4800 feet, heading toward the summit, a fine rain that gave way to a hard shower as we climbed, becoming a torrent of whipping ice pellets as we came to a high open meadow, with ninety-mile-an hour winds. We opened up our map, having taken shelter behind a boulder, and the wind reached around the rock and tore the map to shreds. We ran back down into the woods. To get up our courage, we smoked cigarettes and took some blue pills that Ned produced from his backpack, swallowing in ignorant faith. We decided the shortest way down was to take the Dry River Trail. Running down the trail, we suddenly encountered a raging torrent, whipped up by four inches of rain in two hours. Chest-high streams poured in from the sides. The trail crossed the river bed nine times. One crossing, Ned was swept off his feet, the current grabbing his backpack, and instantly he was fifty yards downstream, struggling to catch onto a rock. We pulled him out, and went on. We were reported lost on the mountain that night, we had no food and our matches were wet. There was no way to cross the huge torrent. Finally we followed an abandoned railway grade to where the huge river spread out into a broad, knee-deep lake, which we stumbled across in the dark, arriving at my car trembling, near shock. We tried to light damp cigarettes from the car's cigarette lighter, and we slugged down a bottle of Cold Duck that had been sitting in the trunk, before driving two hours South to the resort where all our families waited in dread.

Which might explain my disappointment that the wind of the century passed the city by—and perhaps the beginnings of excitement as we get off the train Saturday, and take the van to the ferry. Peering out, we see branches down everywhere, tree trunks driven through aluminum siding, garages flattened, patches of shingles stripped off roofs. It's chilly, but we sit out on the upper deck of the ferry to look for damage. We approach the island.

Look at that, I say, Belvedere lost one of its towers.

Where? Lisa says. Oh my God, you're right.

The ornate Victorian guest house looks bare, stripped down.

We come up to the dock. A small crowd waits, like refugees, holding TV's, cats, green plants, surrounded by piles of boxes.

Go back! someone calls. We can't tell if he's joking. Someone else is singing: Gloria—G-L-O-R-I-A, oh, I'm going to shout all night, Gloria!

I wonder if they have electricity yet, I say.

This is a great time to think of that, my wife says.

We put our stuff in one of the wagons, and wheel it through town. All the stores are boarded up, like in the middle of winter—except the liquor store, which is doing good business. Even on the bay side there are occasional trees knocked down, railings and shingles torn off. Oddly—since there's been so much rain—the leaves of all the trees are dried-out, shriveled, as though their green was sucked out. Nearer to the ocean there's more damage: ominous coils of power lines curl beside the boardwalk, appear suddenly at your shoulder. Roof-decks from one house have been blown through the next. We hurry down the ocean walk. Everyone's fences are down. We approach the house with the breezeway, the two-shoebox house.

We stop.

It's as though some enormous animal, some Godzilla or King Kong, came roaring through. Half the house has been blown away, and a thick trail of sand and debris extends a hundred feet to the boardwalk, which it has smashed through, and on to the next house, where it shattered walls and windows. Roof, walls, furniture, glass doors, everything.

We lift the wagon across the gap in the boardwalk and continue on.

And the *Times* said there was hardly any damage, I say.

Finally we see the house. Perched on its dune, its roof tilted rakishly, its white trim bright.

Looks fine, my wife says. We walk closer.

See, the bay shutter's gone, I say.

And there's Alex's pool, in the grass, my wife says.

The plastic pool blew around the house to land over by the boardwalk.

The wires are down, I say. I point them out, hanging in the beach plum bushes.

Oh no.

And look at the red house.

My God, says my wife.

The red house, just down the

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beach, used to look like a barn: with a high peaked roof pointing out at the ocean. Now the whole house has been cut off just a few feet above the dunes. Living room furniture sits in cold sunlight. An old man is walking around on what remains of the deck.

We walk around the house. Beside the larger shutter on the bay side, another shutter, over the glass door, was blown off its hinges, gouging long grooves in the deck. It now sits against the leafless bushes where deer sometimes hide. The TV antenna's wire is ripped off, and the brace is wrenched out of the wall. The dunes, though wider than before the storm, have been stripped of most of their grass, and all the snowfences have been sheared off at ground level.

Inside, things are much the same as we left them, except for the sand all over, and the horrible stench from the refrigerator—which, thank God, Bill has emptied for us.

We open all the shutters and the windows, and sit at the breakfast counter, looking down at the desolate beach.

I really could use some coffee, my wife says.

Tough luck, I say.

We sit there for awhile.

I'd better see if we have any candles, my wife says.

The hurricane lamps—half a dozen of them on the shelf over the refrigerator, where they've sat for thirty years—have only the faintest, sticky residue of kerosene, and their wicks are crumbling. There's no kerosene under the sink. No flashlights either. We finally locate two birthday candles in the shape of large numbers, and two green bayberry candles and a couple of mouse-gnawed white candles. My wife puts the white candles into water glasses.

Well, I guess we'll go to sleep early, I say.

Later we go walking down the beach, by the bright water.

When we get to the next community we have ample opportunity to meditate if not gloat over the foolishness of rich people who build swimming pools into the dunes and erect high, square, glassy mansions next to the ocean. Gloria ripped them to shreds. One house belongs to a famous designer. It has been torn apart. All the glass is broken, and the roof is entirely gone, like a torn-off boxtop. Several other houses the same. The tall glassy wide ones with the roofs like sails sure did catch the wind.

Your grandfather was smart, I say. That slanted roof was really a good idea.

I know, my wife says. The little houses didn't get it at all.

We walk further down the beach to where a dozen oceanside condos are. They too have high peaked roofs, a zig-zag that is always a good landmark when you are running. Four or five of them are gone. You can see inside: the yellow walls of somebody's kitchen, another kitchen where the cabinet doors have been torn off and you can see cans sitting on the shelves. Someone has already covered the overstuffed couches and coffee tables with clear plastic, which is whipped by the breeze.

Some people walk by.

That's my mother's place, a young man says to an older couple. The first one in. No, not damaged, not as far as I can see. I wish I had her keys, I could check for sure.

They stand in silence. We walk on. The row of houses in from the beach is even worse. In places you can't even get around the roofs and walls that are blown over. One house is burned down. By the time we turn around and head back up the beach, the wind has picked up, and it blows small bits of grit and salt, and we put our arms around each other and struggle against the wind, and then we walk single file. It's getting dark. It feels like we're not making any headway. It takes a very long time to get back to the house.

We play Scrabble by candlelight after dinner, and then we go to bed, with five blankets on the bed, wearing socks and sweaters because it is cold, and we sleep almost twelve hours, and wake to the sound of hammering, and see workers across the way putting blue plastic over a broken wall of a house.

We both have headaches.

Want some coffee? I say.

Very funny, my wife says.

No, I'm not kidding. I'll make a fire on the charcoal grill, heat up some water.

Okay.

You want pancakes?

You can't make pancakes over a charcoal grill, she says.

Want to bet? I say.

Go ahead.

Mix up the batter while I start the fire.

There are some bananas on the table, left over from our last time here. I tell her to mash them up and put them in too.

It takes a long time to cook pancakes over a charcoal grill. It's faster if you put wood on it, so I get some scraps of old decking from downstairs and put them on, and after an hour or so I have about ten pancakes.

We eat them.

Not bad, I say.

These are the worst pancakes I ever ate, my wife says.

The coffee tastes like charbroiled steak.

While we are screwing the bay shutter back on, Bill comes by with his dog. We stand in the cold sunlight, talking.

Lucky it was at low tide, Bill says. Would have washed the whole island away otherwise.

Electricity's on west of Doctor's Walk, he says. We ought to get it around Wednesday. He tells us his house is okay. He tells us one couple stayed here during the storm: they just didn't want to leave.

You going to come out again? Bill says.

Just to close up, just once, I say.

Say hello to your family, Bill says. After he leaves I go around to the other side of the house, and reattach the antenna pole, and put some longer screws into the shutter over the sliding door. My wife is busy inside. When she sees the contractor standing on the ocean walk, talking to some men, she goes down to talk about the plumbing we need done next year. In a little while she comes back.

I talked to the man from the red house, she says. He just retired to live here. He says he just completely redecorated. He just put in a five thousand dollar bathroom. He really looks shaken.

I can believe it, I say. Here, hold the shutter still.

She holds it.

When he rebuilds, she says, he says he's going to put on a roof like ours.

Good idea, I say.

After lunch we pack up, and close the house, and walk through the deserted town to catch the ferry. The water is choppy going back over to the mainland, and there is a long wait for the train, and by the time we get back to the city we both have pounding headaches and are chilled to the bone. We can't wait to get home, now that we know we were spared. □

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Quiet Days in Estelí

DAVID REICH

The most popular dog here is the Pekinese, which strikes me as an odd choice for a country full of Marxist outlaws, bent on destroying our way of life. My own house has no less than three of the Pekes, and one of them bit my thumb last night, though luckily his teeth didn't break the skin. But Carmen saw the whole thing (all I was doing was trying to pet the little monster) and rushed me to the kitchen and cut a lime, which she held against my thumb as if to draw off a poison. Carmen is the same one who irons my socks and underwear with her 1930s vintage iron when I'm off at the construction site and can't do anything about it.

Another local oddity, in addition to all the Pekineses, is the pictures people choose for their living room walls, my favorites being the arrangement in a house I visited the other day, where the Sacred Heart of Jesus is flanked on one side by a black-and-white poster of Che Guevara playing chess and on the other side by Michael Jackson posed against an orange sky—though this trinity seems less bizarre as you accustom yourself to the mood of the place, which is happy and eclectic, especially considering the scummy war that's going on.

Right now, for example, as I stand in the doorway, the Sandinista radio is blaring the news from a room in back—the major league baseball news, that is. These Nicas may be waiting to flatten—in their words—an invasion by the Yankee dog aggressor, but they don't let that stop them from rooting for *los Yankees de Nueva York*, or any other baseball team that happens to catch their imagination. According to the radio, the Yankees took yesterday's game with Boston, in spite of the strong bat of JEE-may Rice. Three thousand miles away from Boston, I look out on a dirt street of small, tin-roofed houses where two kids are playing with a wooden top and at the bottom of the block, in a large goat pasture, a young man is riding a painted pony with milk cans swinging from its flanks.

In the middle of the baseball news, which stretches on for half an hour, Carmen's father, Don Pastor, ambles up the street in a battered hat, back from a trip to Miraflor, where he peddles women's clothing from a leather satchel. A short man in his middle sixties with small ironic eyes, he puts his arm around me and asks how the work on the health clinic goes, then delivers the rather mysterious news that "the enemy has been detected."

"In Estelí?"

"In Estelí."

"What were they doing?"

"Looking . . . looking." He pantomimes a *contra* spy, squinting and shading his eyes with his hand and shifting his gaze from side to side, which doesn't make the danger seem any realer. Actually, in the time I've been here, the town has remained unusually quiet, with the only action being in the country north of here, twenty or thirty kilometers off. On the other hand, the intelligence is probably sound, since Don Pastor is active in the popular militia, which is also why the room we share with Enrique and Saúl, and Doña Luz María, their aged aunt, has ammo on the shelves and automatic rifles propped in all the corners.

Carmen calls us in for lunch. The kitchen walls are rough planks with large chinks to vent the smoke from the hearth. As we chew on our tough steaks fried up with onions and ripe tomatoes, the baseball program finishes and the radio returns to the usual mix of good *ranchera* music, awful Latin pop, and indifferent Top-40 by the likes of McCartney, Madonna, and Jackson—the ubiquitous Michael, naturally.

At a quarter past one, I return to the construction site, where for another three hours I hand-mix cement, a job that resembles a laborious form of mudpie making. Often I'll stop to look off at the hills, which are caught in a pattern of sun and clouds. Back home, the first thing I want is a bath, but the water isn't flowing. Water rarely comes in the afternoon, but today it didn't come in the morning either—at least, not for long enough to fill up the rusty storage barrel. Doña Luz María sees me on the patio outside the bathhouse, holding my towel and my bar of soap. If I want to go up the street, she says, I can fill up a pail at the water tower. She shrugs her small shoulders. Her face looks tired. "The lack of necessities is hard," she tells me. "But here one gets accustomed to this manner of problem."

The building shows a blank, unappealing face to the Calle Principal. The color is a faded gray—like many other buildings here, it could use a coat of paint. Inside the door, though, the picture changes. You walk into a courtyard with marbled arcades, a vast sunken garden, a granite statue of the Virgin. From a pair of gleaming flagpoles fly the Sandinista flag and the national flag of Nicaragua. In the principal's office, a middle-aged nun in a gray-white habit sits behind a polished desk.

I find Dora at the front of a first grade class, teaching a phonetic reading lesson. A woman from my barrio, she is tall and imposing, but this doesn't appear to impress the kids, who are acting like wild kids anywhere, jumping up and down and calling out answers and talking to

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their neighbors, so that Dora has to bully them by passing out demerits and threatening to cancel recreation. It reminds me of my own first grade, New Jersey 1954, the muted light, the tile floors, the teacher's sternness, the never-ending struggle between chaos and authority. When she gets the class to quiet down, though, she proves to be a better teacher than the teachers I remember, logical, thorough, and extremely demanding. In the exercise they're doing now, she calls out a word and appoints a pair of students to write it on the board. When a spelling is way off, she reminds the class that "we have to write down what we hear!" She doesn't raise her voice at all, but the syllables pop off her tongue like a string of exploding firecrackers.

Time for recreation comes, and the kids in their blue and white uniforms march out to the schoolfield and basketball courts, where Dora turns them over to the phys. ed. "professor," a small, mustached fellow in a blue knit sports shirt and chino pants. We stand off away from the games and noise, and Dora talks about the school, sounding proud and serious, like most of the Nicaraguans I've met when they talk about the changes of the last six years.

"Before the revolution this was a private Catholic school. The tuition was so high that only the children of the rich could come. Now it's still a Catholic school but under the Ministry of Education. Any child can come here. The tuition is free. We still have two hours of religious teaching every week, the principal is still a nun, and nine of the twelve original nuns continue teaching here. The other three opposed the revolution, and they left of their own will when Somoza fell in 1979."

I wonder what changes in methods, books, etc. the school has had to make to accommodate the poorer kids. But Dora is only twenty-five, which means that she was still in college when the school changed over from a private to a public institution. She thinks for a minute, wrinkling her high, dark brow. "Well, for one thing," she offers, "we try to give the children some political awareness now."

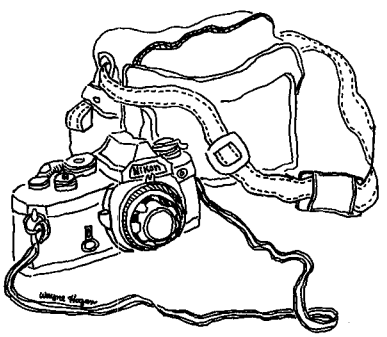
"For example?"

"*Bueno*, for example, we teach them to identify the plants of Nicaragua and to understand that it's their duty to take care of the natural environment."

"It's a strange thing," I say. "Many of the papers back home in the States say that your government is attacking the church, and yet this town is full of churches and people attend the services and no one seems to bother them. The priest in El Calvario is described by the people as 'a good Sandinista.' And now I see this school. . . . Is there any truth at all to the stories I've read?"

Dora gives a slow smile. "What would your conclusion be?"

We're sitting in Rolando's kitchen with its long oaken table and throne-like chairs and its counter of modern appliances. In a pleated *guayabera* and graduation ring, Rolando is the image of a well-fed Latin businessman. Working from the theory that people choose their politics by crude self-interest, I ask what a person of his class might gain from a social revolution, but he talks to me instead about the *campesinos*, how under Somoza they had no land and couldn't exist off their pitiful wages, how their children had no schools to go to, how many went through life without seeing a doctor and many



lacked housing and lived in the road, while now, on the other hand, everyone eats and has a roof over his head, education and health care are free of charge. . . .

"These achievements are very beautiful, very important," I tell Rolando. "But, of course, you're not a *campesino*."

He looks in my eyes with his large green eyes. "Obviously. But, *mira*. My children can attend the university, a *campesino*'s children can attend the university, the children of a worker can attend the university. This is called equality. Now I am proud of my government. In Somoza's time I never voted, knowing who there was to vote for."

Later, on a farm of a couple of hundred acres belonging to Rolando's friend, we stand beside a mango tree on a low fertile ridge with onions, tomatoes, bananas, squash, and other crops. It's Sunday afternoon, and the landscape is still except for a hawk and a couple of buzzards floating in the hazy sky and an occasional army vehicle moving along the Pan Am Highway, which cuts through the middle of Rolando's friend's land. This is in an area north of town, near where the *contra* has attacked in the past. Rolando sweeps a hand across the hot green vista.

"What is the effect if the mercenaries come out here and burn some crops and kill some *campesinos*? To begin with, the people leave the land and nothing is produced. In a country that depends on agriculture, this is a disaster. If nothing is produced, then where do we get the foreign exchange we need to fund development? In the second place, our youth have to join the army and fight for two years and possibly die instead of training to be doctors, engineers, agronomists, which we also need for development. As if this were not enough, the government is forced to put its money into arms instead of schools or medicine or housing. So the war creates hardship and suffering, but the people understand that it isn't the fault of the government, and they're ready to do whatever is needed. Reagan is a madman, an addict of power, but Hitler was a madman also, and the people of the world defeated him. People want to *live*, and this is a desire you cannot crush."

After gathering some mangoes for Rolando's wife, we start back down the covered path. "I talk about fighting, our willingness to fight, but please don't confuse revolution with war. Revolution means changing the lives of the people. A revolutionary sees injustice and says, 'I don't like this, this has to change.' Of course, there may be obstacles. When you want to build a road there may be trees in the way, and then you must sweep the trees aside."

At the end of the path, we stop in the house of one of the tenant farmers. Rustic wood siding with the bark still on it. In the front room a dirt floor, some woven hammocks, the inevitable holy pictures. Rolando and some farmers talk and smoke. Chickens run around the floor, under our chairs and between our feet, until a small girl in a long white dress chases them off with a heavy twig broom. A woman brings in coffee, and a mid-

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dle-aged man in a baseball cap discusses the hike in the price of beans, which he seems extremely happy with. The conversation turns to the city of Masaya, where recently the government, after weeks of demonstrations and demands by landless *campesinos*, redistributed some large plots of idle land. Everybody in the room agrees it was a good decision. Rolando: "How are we supposed to feed ourselves? So much of the land has been out of production. A rich man will say, 'I am saving this farm for my son to work,' and then the son will go off and become an engineer or lawyer."

One evening on someone's patio, some members of my work brigade are discussing the country and its situation and questioning the facts and assumptions we came down here with. I jot down some lines in my spiral-bound notebook.

David S., photographer: I'm surprised by the freedom we have to travel. Our country is sponsoring a war with these people, but when I took a bus up to Ocotal, near the heavy fighting, no one even bothered to ask for my passport, even though I was taking pictures and could have been there for all the wrong reasons. In fact, the last time anyone asked for my passport was coming through customs in Managua.

Chris H., shipbuilder/carpenter: There are shortages of medicine and certain other things, but the economy here is not in a shambles, which is the idea you get from the press back home—even the solidarity press. I haven't seen people depressed by the war, I've seen people excited about going out and building something or going to night school to learn a skill and improve their lives.

Brent C., minister: It's clear to me that the revolution hasn't been imposed on the Nicaraguans; it's something that exists in their lives and their guts. It's hard to be unmoved by their friendliness, their eagerness to feed us and serve us cold drinks, to explain with great patience and reasonableness why agents of our government shouldn't burn their houses down or murder their neighbors. The only thing I wonder is how I will stay in touch with this place when I return to the world of the shopping center.

Sandy M., periodontist: People back home say this can turn into another Vietnam, and I say this is already another Vietnam, and once again our country is taking the wrong side.

An incident this morning on the Calle Principal. I'm walking toward the business district with David the photographer. Across from a fruit and vegetable stand, a semi-circle of militia in camouflage fatigues are guarding a yellow stucco house. The sun glints off the barrels of their AK-47s. If it weren't for them and the quiet crowd that takes up the sidewalk in front of the fruit stand, I wouldn't have noticed anything. The damage to the house is minor, some broken brick and stucco in the corner of a window and a couple of twisted iron bars in the window grating.

We stand on the sidewalk where the crowd is standing. Someone is selling popsicles from a metal wagon at the curb. David takes his camera out and lines up a shot of the house and militia, but one of the boys in camouflage shakes his head no, and David puts the camera down. I notice a small Sandinista flag painted on the stucco near the damaged window, which means that the people who live in the house are supporters of the *Frente*. (Or is it only that the *Frente* graffiti people decided on this wall for one of their flags?) I speak to a woman in an orange blouse and pink hair curlers. All that she or anyone seems to know—or cares to tell us—is that a bomb went off here earlier.

Then I see Don Eluterio, bright-eyed and frail, standing by himself across the street, beyond the boys in camouflage, a shock of curly, sandy hair sticking out from beneath his ratty fatigue cap. This is probably the first time I've ever seen him when he isn't rushing off to somewhere. Don Eluterio works for the CDS, the Sandinista block committees, and he's fanatically devoted to seeing that the clinic goes up on schedule. He tracks down scarce materials, borrows large trucks from the government, recruits Nicaraguan volunteers to work on Sunday mornings, even sleeps out at the site to keep away thieves and little children and anyone else that might cause problems.

I go over and tap him for information, and yes, he knows what happened. The door of the house was booby-trapped, and when an eight year old boy of the family left for school this morning. . . . What is the condition of the little boy? It isn't known at present. They have translated him to the Capital for surgery of the brain.

All this is said without any visible emotion, unless seriousness can be called an emotion.

"The work of the *contra*, I suppose," I offer rather stupidly. What do you say at a terrorist bombing?

"It is to be assumed."

"And would you be acquainted with the family of the boy?"

"Yes, he is my nephew."

This stops me for a minute. Finally I find some words. I tell Don Eluterio I'm terribly sorry and ask him to pass on any news about the boy's condition.

"*Gracias*," he says. "Yes, of course I will."

Later, when I think of this odd conversation, I'm reminded of my visit to Doña Estela's, the mother of a friend of Carmen's. A group of us were sitting in the living room, chatting and drinking tamarind drinks while a few of the grandchildren chased a small kitten around the house. At one point a grandchild with wavy hair and a pale pink ribbon sat down in Doña Estela's lap, and with no change of expression, Doña Estela said to us, "This little girl's father was killed in an ambush fifteen days ago." She might have been explaining that the little girl's father was out of town on business.

It was my third day in the country and my first in town, and at the time I thought her attitude was the product of shock or fatalism or possibly even callousness, but thinking of the people I've gotten to know here and considering their lives, I lose the desire and confidence to label it or judge it. The experience of colonialism, especially the Somoza years, has turned the Nicaraguans into experts on death, the gradations of death, the many ways of dying—death at the hands of the National Guard, death by addiction and forced prostitution, death by starvation, polio, tuberculosis. Couple this with the fact that most Nicaraguans, unlike Ronald Reagan, believe that a *contra* victory would inevitably mean a return to Somoza-style government, and you can see why they'd be so willing to lay down their lives and the lives of those they love. According to the hard equations that people in their circumstances have to live by, death as a martyr of the revolution may have more to recommend it than death for the lack of a pound of beans or a dose of penicillin. □

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The American Hörspiel

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

It is commonly said, by those who care about such issues, that few radio plays of note have been produced in America—few, compared to Germany, where they are called *Hörspiel* or "ear-play," and few compared even to England. This is true; for aside from Orson Welles's adaptation of *War of the Worlds* (1938) and Archibald MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* (1937), little in formal American radio drama has survived on radio, in print, on phonograph records or in collective memory; and in truth, little is worth preserving. However, this summary conclusion scarcely exhausts critical discussion. The more closely we study the whole of American art, especially in contrast to European, we see that one crucial difference between the two is that much of our greatest art comes informally dressed as sub-art, or popular art. With its origins in vernacular, this sort of American art customarily succeeds with a mass audience before critics recognize its uncommon virtues. Among the best examples of first-rank excellence in this vernacular tradition are Mark Twain in fiction, the Marx Brothers in film, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker in music. There was a comparable vernacular development in the history of American radio drama; but here, by contrast to the other arts, the vernacular work exceeded the formal in both esthetic and cultural importance. After investigating the history of American radio, and listening to many sorts of radio plays, I have come to the conclusion that the greatest theater on American radio appeared not in the formal works by the poets and playwrights but in the informal works of radio comedy.

It should be clear that this essay is about fictional plays, which have characters, settings and human interaction and are thus separate from comic monologues that belong to another theatrical category whose American masters include Will Rogers, Bob Hope, Lord Buckley, George Carlin and Richard Pryor, among others, and separate as well from funny quiz shows, like Groucho Marx's *You Bet Your Life*, that were essentially nonfictions designed to prompt the quiz-master's wit.

Comparing the history of *Hörspiel* in Germany with America, we immediately see a decisive difference in origins. If European (as well as Canadian) programming was subsidized from a tax leveled against every radio in use, Americans got their programs gratis. "Radio is the first free entertainment ever given to the public," Fred Allen quipped. "Since it was piped into houses, it was a service similar to running water." As the public was not charged, the privately owned producing companies depended for their financial survival upon the sale of advertising space, in this case *minutes*, to corporate sponsors. (Official European radio had no advertisements.) And since America had more stations than all European countries combined, the broadcasting networks here impressed potential sponsors by distributing centrally produced programs to the largest number of semi-independent stations across the country. These stations in turn needed popular network shows to attract not only a maximum number of listeners within range of their signal but local advertisers as well. (One truth that should not be lost on historians is that once the number of American radio stations increased from one in 1920 to a few in 1921 to several hundred in 1922, the broadcasting industry had simply burgeoned beyond the European model of government control. Here, as elsewhere, Americans had successfully mass-merchandized an innovation that Europeans thought would, and should, belong only to an élite.) Thus, given this need to win the allegiance of local stations on the one hand, and the need to attract national corporations as sponsors on the other, an individual network radio program could succeed only by appealing to an audience that was not only very large but very regular. Programs of literary drama could not generate a loyal mass audience; they, by contrast, were usually sponsored by the networks themselves, as a kind of prestigious charity (that no doubt garnered respect by imitating a European development). *Fall of the City*, for instance, initially appeared, April 11, 1937, on a weekly unsponsored ("sustaining") CBS show called *The Columbia Workshop;* the famous *War of the Worlds* was broadcast over the same venue on October 30, 1938.

Given such commercial purposes, it is scarcely surprising that by the early 1930s vaudevillians were invited to work in American radio (and given their origins, it is no surprise that they preferred performing before a live audience whose laughter would be audible over the home radio). In Europe, by contrast again, the radio stations were publicly owned; they had pedagogical mandates. Those in charge of producing *Hörspiel* felt particularly obliged to present semblances of literary European theater—a tradition that incidentally excluded cabaret. (Typically, live audiences would never be present when such works were broadcast.) Thus, at the same time that European *Hörspiel* was developing a high literary style, something else was happening in America. (Here, as elsewhere in this essay, I prefer using the German word *Hörspiel*, not only because it sounds more elegant and authoritative than the roughly similar English of "radio drama," but because it is also more encompassing, in its current usage, incorporating kinds of Audio Art that we would not customarily classify as "radio drama"—for two examples, John Cage's *Roaratorio* (1979) and Charles Dodge's *Any Resemblance Is Purely Coincidental* (1981). Since my own bias is that *Hörspiel* should become an English word, I will henceforth use it as though it already were.)

Not all vaudevillians working in radio made horspiel. Some merely told jokes or repeated before the microphone the routines they had developed on the live stage. Indeed, some performed in comic costumes that, ineffectively, impressed just the small audience present in the recording studio. It was only the most adventurous and insightful who realized that something else could, and should, be done in radio. For

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instance, whereas the touring vaudevillian could expect to have a different audience each night, the radio comedian appearing once a week had to expect that most of the people listening to one show would listen to the next; different material for *every* night was absolutely essential. As Fred Allen, the most sophisticated of these comedians, put it, "On stage a good monologue could last two or three weeks; on radio, only one week." In fact, however, Allen was scarcely the first to recognize that radio made other demands upon the vaudevillian, not the least of which was a need for devices to induce listeners to tune into the next show. Others, such as Freeman F. Gosden and Charles J. Correll, had made such perceptions before him. By contrast, those vaudeville stars who simply redid their stage shows before a microphone—Ed Wynn, Eddie Cantor and Joe Penner, among others—did not survive for long on radio.

It should be noted that radio comedy was scarcely the only kind of horspiel on American radio at the time. Especially for the daytime audience of housewives there were "soap operas" that, between advertisements for kitchen soaps, dealt with family travails in serial form (comparable to the television domestic dramas that are now broadcast during midday America), and there were westerns, sometimes called "horse operas," like "The Lone Ranger" or "Straight Arrow," that appealed particularly to boys. However, in the heyday of American radio, from 1933 to 1953, the most popular horspiel, the most widely beloved shows, were comedies that were broadcast in the evenings—in "prime time," as we now say—for the entire family. Indeed, one show, "Amos 'n' Andy," was so popular in the early 1930s that many movie theaters did not dare open until 7.30 p.m., which was a safe fifteen minutes after "Amos 'n' Andy" signed off. "Approximately a third of the nation listened to them between 1929 and 1935," according to Arthur Frank Wertheim in *Radio Comedy* (1979). "The entire nation seemed addicted to the program, from the poor, who listened in front of store windows, to the wealthy Vincent Astor and Henry Ford, each of whom sat listening to it in his plush living room." After a tour of America, George Bernard Shaw told reporters, "There are three things which I shall never forget in America—the Rocky Mountains, Niagara Falls and "Amos 'n' Andy."

Shows such as this realized the potential of a national audience, which even in a country as expansive, diverse and numerous in time zones as America did not become a conceptual possibility until the new era of mass communications. Indeed, radio functioned to connect the disparate parts of the country to one another, to show all Americans that we lived in a single culture, with one language that could be nationally understood and with entertainment experiences that could be nationally shared. "Thanks to radio comedy," Fred Allen observed, "the farmer isolated in the midwest felt he too was in the audience in New York, Chicago or Hollywood." Because radio programming came into the house free, it was accessible to everyone who could afford a receiver, regardless of class, economic status and the language one's parents spoke.

2.

The pioneers were Freeman F. Gosden and Charles J. Correll, two caucasians living in Chicago, who in 1926 began a daily program about the activities of two black men, initially named Sam and Henry. Rather than doing autonomous shows, Gosden and Correll wrote a serial whose characters and scenes were sustained from one show to the next. Rather than doing a theatrical performance before a live audience incidentally overheard by the microphone (and thus fed into home receivers), they performed in a small silent studio. Working within a limited budget, they were complete radio artists: They wrote their own scripts, played all the roles themselves and even, at the beginning, handled their own sound effects. When they moved from one local station to another, Sam became Amos and Henry became Andy. So successful did their Chicago program quickly become that by 1928 they syndicated it privately by distributing acetate records, several weeks in advance, to stations elsewhere around the country. By 1929, the National Broadcasting Company had contracted them to perform over its new network. Their show was an instant national success, making its creators America's first great radio comedians.

The key esthetic discovery of their situation comedy was the medium's capacity for audio illusions. Quite simply, thanks both to possibilities unique to radio and to their talents at mimicking the speech of others, two white men could completely and fluently assume the roles of two *black* men, Amos Jones and Andy Brown; they could be on radio the black men they could never be on stage, on film or in real life. While this performance superficially extended the nineteenth-century black-face tradition of white men playing blacks before an audience that knew the performers were really white, the illusory power of radio enabled Gosden and Correll to become something else—black and only black in the audience's minds. The key to their illusory success, to repeat, was speech so flawlessly authentic in accent, grammar and intonation that even black listeners heard the performers as black. Indeed, even after one has seen photographs of the show's creators, who did not hide their faces from the audience, it is still hard to visualize white men behind their voices.

To put it another way, Gosden and Correll discovered the principle that in radio drama voice and only voice could wholly determine perceptible character; and it is a further sign of their extraordinary personal talents, married to the unique capacities of radio, that, for most of the show's history, these two men played *all* the programs' characters, including several other black men, black women, white people and even animals! An informative description of their working procedure appears in the Wertheim book mentioned above:

> During the broadcast they sat at a table opposite one another. The microphone was placed near Correll's right elbow, and to imitate Andy the actor spoke in a low voice approximately one inch from the mike. When he was impersonating Amos, Gosden sat about two feet from the microphone, using a high-pitched voice. To do Sylvester [another character] he inched closer to the microphone and spoke in an extremely soft tone. Gosden not only did the Kingfish but also Lightnin' and other minor parts. Correll played Henry Van Porter, Brother Crawford and most of the white characters. . . . On one show they had to pretend that Amos and Andy were being chased by robbers, so before air time they ran around the studio for three minutes until they were out of breath. For the closing fadeout the

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two slowly walked away from the table as they said their final lines.

Gosden and Correll also authored the scripts and directed themselves, rather than separating those functions (on the European model) and, for these reasons, were complete *hörspielmachers,* to use the current German honorific.

Race was scarcely the only physical fact that an effective radio actor could disguise. As Gosden and Correll wrote in their first book, *All about "Amos 'n' Andy"* (1929):

> It was decided that, on account of the character of Amos being excitable, sympathetic, kind and younger than Andy, Amos should have a high, thin voice. With a voice of this type, Amos can more easily excite the listener or play on his sympathy, as the different situations present themselves. In contrast to him, it was decided that Andy should have a deep voice, thus portraying his domineering, boastful, and conceited nature.

Just as it did not matter that both Gosden and Correll were in fact white, and their normal speaking voices were actually quite similar, so it did not matter that, contrary to their fiction, Gosden (Amos) was actually tall and lanky, while Correll (Andy) was in fact short and stocky. Moreover, on radio they could for over two decades play characters who remained essentially the same age! (When their show moved to television in the 1950s, as Gosden was over fifty and his partner over sixty, other actors, of course visibly black, had to be found to recreate their radio roles.)

3.

Another group of audio illusions depends upon sound effects to create scenes that, while they could be imagined visually, really exist only as sound. Take the famous closet scene that frequently appeared in the programs of Fibber McGee and Molly. It customarily opens with Molly's middle-American voice hysterically warning her husband (or a guest) that he was opening not a door to go outside or into another room but, alas, the door to a closet crammed full of household junk. As we hear things falling to the floor, listen carefully and you will notice that its duration is far longer than such an accident would take in real life—often as long as ten seconds—in part because we *hear* more junk than any closet could possibly contain. That listeners could accept such excess, including the sounds of late pieces invariably falling on top of the pile, is a measure of its success as an illusion. In another domestic drama, Judy Canova's "Ma and Pa," the wife offers her husband "fresh biscuits" for breakfast. After he accepts them, we hear a sound similar to that of wood cracking, followed by his exclamation, "Fluffy, ain't they?" The success of this second gag depends upon the surprise implicit in the fact that, when the crack is heard, Pa's face is *not* seen. One ironic variation on the closet gag, also used often by Fibber McGee and Molly, has Molly screaming her familiar warning. What follows is silence that, because it too comes as a surprise, is likewise better heard than seen. (In the world of the blind, I remember Marshall McLuhan saying, all things are sudden.)

In Jack Benny's work is a scene, likewise often repeated, in which he asks his loyal servant Rochester to start the car engine. Rochester tells him that the car, a Maxwell (manufactured by a company already long defunct), is so old that it has not run recently. Benny encourages him to try anyway. He does (with one of the great comic voices that by its hoarse, shrill quality alone can, in my observation, bring laughter even to people who do not understand English). We hear an engine starting and then a sputtering, wheezing, coughing sound that, while it is not authentic, is vividly evocative. (In fact, these noises were made by a human being named Mel Blanc, whose extraordinary talents will be discussed later.) One quality that makes this acoustic joke interesting is that, like the closet mentioned before, it would not work so well on stage or film. Since a sputtering engine does not move, there is nothing to see (and everything to hear); the sight of it, or of people watching it, would be irrelevant and distracting. That is to say, the gag succeeds as an exclusively acoustic experience.

Another acoustic joke repeated on the Benny show portrayed initially through sounds was the vault where Benny, the stingy man's stingy man, kept even his small bills. Like Fibber McGee's closet, this depended upon the skill of a sound-effects man, who would initially make the sound of footsteps in a long tunnel, the creak of steel doors locked with iron chains, the clicks of a combination lock rotating and the squeak of a handle turning in a rusted channel. Then, as Wertheim describes it, "Suddenly a burglar alarm reverberated, steam whistles blew, bells rang, gunshots exploded, and a fog horn went BEEEE OHHHHH. The opening of the vault got a laugh every time it was heard on radio." "The Jack Benny Show," incidentally, was not a serial on the "Amos 'n' Andy" model, but a series of shows, each dramatically complete in itself, with the same primary characters; each show was based upon a comic premise that usually exploited an idiosyncracy of a regular character.

Exploiting this radio fiction that voice and voice alone could be character, some performers tried to build whole personalities around a certain striking accent or vocal quality. One of the McGee neighbors was Wallace Wimple, the prototypical henpecked husband, whose whimpering voice vividly evoked personal weakness. "I spoke back to her," he told McGee at the Elks Club. "That's why I'm here. I'm a wifeugee." (Wimple's voice made such a strong impression that four decades later, long after the show had gone, Americans still speak of a weak man as a "wimp," whereas, according to Eric Partridge, in Britain the epithet is slang for a young woman.) A later character in the Fibber McGee & Molly show was their black maid Beulah, who sounded true to her role, even though she was, in the tradition of Gosden-Correll, initially played by a white man. Similarly, Jack Pearl, by speaking with a thick German accent that did not muffle his diction, developed, in the early 1930s, the character of Baron Munchausen, a sort of prototypical German. His recurring scene was an interview with an American radio reporter (or an actor playing such a reporter). Not only did Pearl-Munchausen pronounce English words in German ways (saying "soup" as "tzoup") and misunderstand American slang in self-embarrassing ways, but into his English he incorporated German definitions and German rules for pronouncing every letter, such as speaking of Wednesday (which he pronounced in the German fashion of articulating every consonant as "Ved-ness-day") as coming "in the center of the week" (echoing the German *Mittwoch*). Though a New York Jew in his personal origins, Pearl became a German caricature to his listeners; yet for all of his illusionary success, Mun-

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chausen's life on radio was short, in part because this character, as a theatrical creation, was thin. Instead, Pearl-Munchausen became the prototype for other radio characters with pronounced ethnic accents, such as Ole the Swedish-American handyman and Nick Depopolous in Fibber McGee and Molly, Ajax Cassady and Mrs. Nussbaum in Fred Allen's alley, J. Carroll Nash's Luigi Basko, Mr. Kitzel on the Jack Benny show and both the Mad Russian and Parkyakarkus (itself a pun) on the Eddie Cantor Show.

Edgar Bergen was a ventriloquist who performed mostly in theaters around his native Chicago. He developed a dummy named Charlie McCarthy, who was given the character of an aggressive, conceited, truth-telling young man. On stage, McCarthy was perceived as Bergen's diminutive dummy; but on radio, he had a character of his own—a human being who had no audible connection to the quiet, modest ventriloquist who spoke his lines. Not only did McCarthy speak more than Bergen, he often bossed Bergen around, deluding the radio audience into imagining their relationship as the opposite of reality. As Marshall McLuhan acutely observed in *The Mechanical Bride* (1951):

> Dramatic illusion can scarcely go any further than in those exchanges between Bergen and Charlie where Charlie announces that he is about to sever relations with his boss Bergen. He is about to vamoose with Bergen's girlfriend or a radio guest.

Bergen later introduced other characters named Mortimer Snerd and Effie Klinker, whose voices likewise came from him, but who nonetheless led autonomous lives on radio.

The actress Fanny Brice discovered a more complicated illusory twist. She was an adult playing a little girl named Baby Snooks who had the voice of a child, or an almost-child, and the intelligence and diction of an adult, or an almost-adult. In the following scene, she and her father are in a department store:

> I have a good mind not to buy you an Easter bonnet.
>
> Awight. Buy me a bicycle.
>
> I won't buy you a bonnet and I won't buy you a bicycle.
>
> *(Cries)* Waah!
>
> Stop crying.
>
> *(Cries louder)* Waahhh!!
>
> Good heavens . . . everybody in the store is looking at us. Stop crying and I'll buy you a bonnet.
>
> *(Laughs)*
>
> What are you laughing about? I knew it would work!

Brice created not an illusory child but an ironic child whose comedy depended upon the disparity between the sound of her voice and the quality of her speech. One way that Brice's character differs from the others mentioned here is that it could succeed on stage or screen, where the irony would be compounded by our hearing the voice of a child emerging from a figure visibly adult.

Fred Allen had made radio programs for several years, under several titles, before he developed his most mature show, called "Allen's Alley" (1942-1949). It depended upon a cast of emphatic speaking voices that were, in Marshall McLuhan's percipient distinction, *hot* rather than cool—highly defined rather than common; for the sensory limitation of radio—it was only sound—demanded exaggeration (in contrast to television, which is conducive to understatement). Allen's own nasal voice, as it approached the whine, characterized him as a peevish man, and he was full of jokes that were true to his character: "California is a nice place to live, if you are an orange." He suggested that the Turkish delight halvah "tastes like cheap beaverboard" and once evoked the image of a scarecrow so terrifying it "scared the crows so badly they brought back corn they had stolen two years before." So much did his greatest lines depend upon his idiosyncratic voice and delivery that Steve Allen, another literate comedian (and no relation), once observed that Fred Allen's comedy "was probably more secure from plagiarism than that of any other peforming humorist. Most of Fred's jokes had to be heard coming out of his mouth to sound as funny as they were." Portland Hoffa, his wife in both fact and fiction, had a shrill voice that Allen characterized as resembling "two slate pencils mating, or a clarinet reed calling for help."

The title of his show referred to an urban street down which he and Portland walked, paying social calls on its denizens, asking questions about their current thoughts and activities. What their highly distinctive voices defined was less characters than stereotypes. The humor usually descended from their hyperbolic personalities and exaggerated, if stereotypical, responses. Senator Beauregard Claghorn was a southerner whose aggressive blustery speech continually interrupted Allen:

> C: Somebody—I say, somebody knocked.
>
> A: Yes, I—
>
> C: Claghorn's the name—Senator Claghorn, that is.
>
> A: I know. Don't give me that routine about Dixie.
>
> C: I won't go into a room unless it's got Southern exposure.
>
> A: Well—
>
> C: The only train I ride is the Chattanooga Choo-Choo.
>
> A: Just a—
>
> C: (SING) The sun shines bright in my old Kentucky home.—
>
> A: Now wait—
>
> C: I'm singin' "My Old Kentucky Home," Son.
>
> A: I know—
>
> C: Son, bend down, and kiss my Jefferson Davis button.

Titus Moody, by contrast, was a dour-voiced New Englander with a taste for cornball humor, and Mrs. Nussbaum with her thick Jewish-American accent represents recent immigrants, while Ajax Cassady was an indulgent Irish-American. Each character was given a repertoire of repeated phrases true to his or her stereotype—Moody's was "Howdy, bub," while Mrs. Nussbaum regularly twisted familiar names to give them a New York sound, for instance referring to two of the 48 states as "Matzos-chusetts" and "Matzos-sippi." These were stereotypes, not characters, because they were portrayed as responding to others primarily in terms of their social peculiarity. That is, Claghorn is a southerner in every sentence he says, while Amos and Andy, by contrast, rarely respond as blacks. They respond as human beings, which is one reason why they are richer horspiel characters.

Whereas both Rochester and Jack Benny, like Allen and his cronies, had a single voice so individual that anything they said was instantly attributable, another major figure in Benny's program had the opposite job of needing to suggest a multitude of fresh characters with no more resources than his speaking voice. As a master of alternative vocal articulations, Mel Blanc was (and is) unrivaled. America knew him primarily as the voice of Bugs Bunny, a cartoon rabbit with the language and intelligence of a human being; for the

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movies Blanc also played the voices of Daffy Duck, Porky Pig and Tweetie Pie. On the Jack Benny program, he was initially hired to be a polar bear named Carmichael; but before long he also became Benny's French violin teacher ("Professor Andre Le Blanc") and a mysterious, unnamed Hispanic-American whose vocabulary consisted mostly of similar sounding words ("si," "saw," "sew," "soy," "Cy" and "Sue"). Through acoustic distortion that suggested a public address system Blanc could typically be heard announcing horse races or "Train leaving on Track Five for Anaheim, Azusa, and Cuc . . . amonga." He could also speak through the voices of a polar bear, a parrot, a goldfish (all of whom could exist visually only in cartoon forms) and, as noted before, imitate machines. Benny's scriptwriter, Milt Josefsberg, remembers,

> We frequently wrote in minor roles for him, tried to invent new characters and, best of all from our standpoint, put into the script the most impossible parts for him to portray. . . . In one bit we had Jack ask a man something on a street, and in the stage directions we had written the instructions: 'Mel answers, using the voice of a Colored Jewish fag.' Damned if he didn't do it. [In another scene at a racetrack,] Jack said, 'Oh, look, Mary—there's that English horse.' Then the stage directions read: 'Mel whinnies like an English horse.' And he did. . . . It is difficult to describe on the printed page Mel's portrayal of an English horse, but he did a 'whinney,' and then he added 'A-Haw' like a typical caricature version of an elderly English gentleman.

Blanc became so renowned for his abilities that Benny could eventually make self-reflexive jokes about them. The show's parody of Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" begins with Benny's memory of entering the jungle. "We heard the cry of the wild boar." (And in the background we hear extended roars, clearly inauthentic, which is to say that we know they are made by a human being imitating an animal.) "The frightening whinney of our horses." (Fairly authentic yodeling.) "The wild chattering of the monkeys." (A babble of chirping sounds.) "The maniacal screech of the hyena." (Hysterical belches.) "The terrifying sound of the crocodile." And since nothing is heard, Benny repeats himself, as though the reptile had missed his cue. Still there is only silence. As the audience laughs, Benny concludes, less angry than pleased, "I knew if I kept trying I'd find something that Mel Blanc couldn't do."

4.

Another strategy mastered by Benny was his ability, matched by no one before or since, of exploiting silence to generate a laugh *before* the punch line as well as after. When a response was required, he would often pause. The audience anxiously expecting a joke would release its laughter, literally over silence; and then when Benny finally delivered his punch line, the audience would laugh again. Listen, for example, to a recording of his single most famous scene, where a street thief proposes, "Your money or your life?" and then repeats it, "Look, bud, your money or your life?" You can hear the audience laugh not only after but *before* Benny's classic retort, "I'm thinking it over." Because Benny depended so much upon absence, or "dead air" as they say in the radio business, it was thought that once he moved into television there would be a loss. Such was not to happen. Instead, for the camera he cleverly developed a certain hopeless, deadpan look that served the same extraordinary function of instigating the initial laugh with silence.

Here, as elsewhere, Benny had a genius for making humor that, unlike children of myth, is better heard than seen. Such jokes could be made with sound effects, as we have observed; they could be made with speech that sets its own scene:

> What track does the Super Chief leave on?
>
> I don't know.
>
> Well, what time does the Super Chief leave?
>
> I don't know.
>
> Oh. Where can I get my space confirmed on the Super Chief?
>
> I don't know.
>
> (*Mad.*) Well, for heaven's sake, if you don't know anything, why are you standing around this 'Information' Counter?
>
> Because somebody stole my pants and I can't run around in my underwear.

Another program was entirely devoted to a bus tour of residential Hollywood, the guide identifying the homes of all the celebrities. As Josefsberg remembers it, "The program had nearly run out of time when the bus driver said, 'We are passing the home of Jack Benny,' and at this point Jack spoke his first line which was: 'Stop the bus, driver; here's where I get off.' " It was, of course true to his character as a skinflint to take transportation cheaper than a taxi. More important, however, is the joke's suitability to radio. Josefsberg continues:

> In television, it would have been difficult to do the joke because we would have had Jack hidden, either reading a newspaper or squatting down in his seat. Both of these devices would have been a case of 'cheating' the audience, because on a sight-seeing bus everybody is supposed to be sitting upright. . . . But we were able to do this on radio.

To put it another way, what radio offered Benny is the possibility of theatrical surprise—to the blind all things are sudden.

As America became a country where almost everyone understood the principal language, popular comedians could depend upon their audience's understanding of puns and other simple linguistic jokes that, since they had no visual element, were perfectly appropriate to radio. Fibber McGee specialized in alliterative monologues full of tongue-twisters that exploited the mask of radio, if only because listeners, unable to see the speaker's face, wondered with awe how long the feat could be sustained:

> Punch bowl McGee, pronounced by press and public that pugilistic pixie of the pedigreed paperweight pugs, pummeling pudgy palookas, pulverizing proboscises and paralyzing plug-uglies. Pounding poor preliminary pork and beaners to a pulp with a peppy pip of a pop—positively a peach of a punch that plunks the punks on their piazzas. Ping-pong poppa of the pineapple punch, a peculiar poke that petrifies the pit of the paunch of the pillow-pushers who plop to the platform, too popeyed to protest. Prancin' and posin' and full of ambition.

Three pairs of comedians—Abbott and Costello, Burns and Allen, the Easy Aces—specialized not in explicit puns but misunderstandings that came from mistaking one word for another. For instance, Costello hears U-Drive, the cute name of an auto-rental company, as "you drive," and upon this initial literal misunderstanding he and Bud Abbott built a classic routine. He

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hears the rental company's name, Hertz, as "hurts." Since Abbott declares "This company's head's Hertz," Costello suggests the best palliative would be aspirin. As Abbott tries in vain to clarify, Costello screams in frustration, "Am I mixed up." In their single most famous routine, the pair identify the players of a baseball team. Even though Abbott warns Costello that the players have "very strange names, peculiar names," Costello cannot comprehend that the first baseman might be named "Who," and so repeats his question of "Who's on first?" Since Abbott merely assents, "Yes," Costello remains confused. The second baseman has the surname of "What," while "I don't know" plays third base. This gag of Costello's verbal incomprehension is pursued through all nine members of the team: "Because" is centerfield, "Tomorrow" is the pitcher, "Today" is the catcher, while the shortstop is "I don't give a darn." Even though the form of the joke is essentially the same, the variations are so inventive and striking that the routine does not lose energy. What finally makes this scene so classic is timing so acute that, even if one knows the basic joke in advance, he or she can hear the routine again and again with undiminished appreciation. This last experience of undiminished reappreciation is, to my mind, one measure of quality that is appropriately called *classic*.

With Burns and Allen the routines were less elaborate, but nonetheless effective. George Burns was, like Bud Abbott, a straight man who stoically suffered the mistakes of his partner.

> B: You're absolutely brilliant. I'm beginning to think you are a wizard.
>
> A: I'm a wizard?
>
> B: Yes. You know what a wizard is.
>
> A: Yes, a snowstorm.
>
> B: Well, if that's a snowstorm, then what's a blizzard?
>
> A: A blizzard is the inside of a chicken. Anybody knows that.
>
> B: Then if that's a blizzard, what's a lizard?
>
> A: A lizard is a man that's smart . . . a genius.
>
> B: Did something happen to you when you were a baby?
>
> A: When I was born, I was so surprised I couldn't talk for a year and a half.

The Easy Aces—Goodman and Jane Ace, likewise married both in fiction and in fact—developed an act with similar dynamics. Although the husband was by reputation a skilled jokesmith, their comedy show depended upon the persona of his wife, who was less simple-minded, like Gracie Allen, than scatterbrained and malapropic. Her greatest lines were reformulations of clichés: "Familiarity breeds attempts," "Time wounds all heels," "We're all cremated equal," "Living in squandor," "Let's begin at the beguine," "That's the wrong altitude," "The crank of dawn," "I was down on the Lower East Side today and saw those old testament houses." Selected to do jury duty, she vows, "I'll say he's not guilty, whoever he is. If he's nice enough to pay me three dollars a day to be his jury, the least I can do is recuperate, doesn't it to you." The Easy Aces had a stronger aural presence and quicker pace than Burns & Allen, who were really meant for television, where they had a richer success. One quality that marks this strain of comedy as indigenous is that nearly all of it is incomprehensible to English-speaking foreigners.

Since most radio programs in this period included live music, not only in concerts both classical and popular, but as background to evoke mood or to separate scenes, it was scarcely surprising that some musicians became radio comedians and that the best of those musical comedians should become stars with a show of their own. The master here was Spike Jones, his group was called the City Slickers, and their typical theatrical situation was the self-reflexive one of them performing their work. Thus, not only is familiar music disrupted by incorrigible anarchic digressions, but the conventions of musicianship are themselves mocked. During one piece, Jones stops his band to ask a musician in what key he is playing. "A" is the reply. He asks the same question of another musician who likewise replies "A." A third musician agrees. Then we hear three gunshot sounds followed by Jones's explanation: "Since when do we all play in the same key?" Though the City Slickers were capable of donning eccentric costumes, and playing clownish instruments, there is no need to see gags that can be heard so clearly.

5.

Comedy thrived on American radio until the early 1950s, when television suddenly became more popular, quickly surpassing radio as the principal medium of electronic mass entertainment in America. Some of the great radio comedians successfully moved into television—Jack Benny, for one—while others who could not make the transition, such as Fred Allen, were forced into premature retirement. What was lost was humor unique to radio. In his Benny biography quoted before, the scriptwriter Josefsberg remembers a routine where Rochester, in the midst of cooking dinner, asks Benny to borrow some sugar from a neighbor. As he is departing, Rochester tosses a metallic cup that falls to the floor, making a tinny sound.

> Next we heard Jack open the door and his footsteps on the sidewalk as he walked to the Colmans' house. Then, in addition to Jack's footsteps, we heard the sound of a woman's footsteps approaching Jack. Suddenly we heard the clink of a coin in the tin cup, and Jack said, 'Oh, thank you, madam.' Now this was one of the biggest hits we ever had, but it could only be done on radio, not television.
>
> On television this routine would have been very artificial and contrived. Jack would have had to be walking not with the cup in his hand hanging down by his side, which is the natural way it would be carried. He would have had to be holding it in his hand with his arm outstretched, which would immediately tip the viewers off that something unusual was planned. . . .

Likewise, several of the best Benny jokes described in the preceding pages did not succeed on television—the Maxwell, the vault, etc.

As the money of sponsoring advertisers followed the American audience, the business of producing radio became less profitable and, in a twist, less dependent upon commercial ambitions. "When television belatedly found its way into the home, after stopping off too long at the tavern," Fred Allen wrote in 1954, "the advertisers knew they had a more potent force available for their selling purposes. Radio was abandoned like the bones at a barbecue." With sponsors paying less, radio production had to become more economical, as it was at the beginning; and those who could produce safely under a cost ceiling were allowed certain freedoms. Simply, as a general rule, performers addressing a small audience are more likely to be left to themselves.

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The avatars of post-television radio comedy were Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding, commonly known as Bob & Ray. Whereas Jack Benny worked with a team of writers and a cast of regular characters, Bob and Ray usually had only themselves. They wrote most of their own scripts and, in the tradition of Gosden and Correll, performed all their characters' voices by themselves. (In European studios by this time, there would be a different actor for every role.) But whereas Gosden and Correll succeeded through perfect mimicry, the comedy of Bob & Ray usually depended upon their *imperfect* imitations of a variety of characters and stereotypes (whose models were less ethnic than professional); and whereas other pairs divided into mensch and maniac, Bob & Ray were capable of being either to the other. The names of their cast of characters reek of an ironic Dickensian comedy: Jacobus Pike, Wally Ballou, Bif Burns, Mary Backstayge, Dr. Muu, Judge Merton Claypool, David Chetley, Mary McGoon, Calvin Hoogavin, Webley Webster, Good Professor Groggins, Dean Archer Armstead, T. Wilson Messy, David & Linda Lovely, Fielding Backstayge, Nurse Rudehouse, Jack Headstrong, Chester Hasbrouck Frisbie, Word Carr, Mr. Trace ("Keener than most persons"), Mister Science, Maitland W. Montmorency, Jasper Witherspoon, Komodo Dragon Expert, etc.

Since circumstances required Bob & Ray to appear several times a week, in contrast to Benny who broadcast only once a week, they could improvise through an entire program, often with a continuing parody, a sort of pseudo-serial, of radio soap operas. One sign of difference was that, if "Mary Noble, Backstage Wife" might be a typical name for an American soap opera, theirs was called "Mary Backstayge, Noble Wife." Whereas earlier radio comedians customarily honored their sponsors, Bob & Ray parodied the rhetoric of advertising, as well as other kinds of linguistic pomposity, with a quiet, dry irreverence. Back in 1951, they were offering listeners a Bob & Ray Burglar Kit that included jimmies, glass-cutters, and metal files. This kit could be ordered by mail, they said. "When the postman brings your package, in a plain wrapper marked only 'Burglar Kit,' take $3.95 from him." In another parody they offered a Home Surgery Kit. "How many times have you said to yourself, 'Golly, I wish I could take out my tonsils.'" In Erik Barnouw's judgment, the audacity of Bob & Ray "would scarcely have been possible in earlier years." By this time in American history, they could capitalize elaborately upon the audience's familiarity with the numerous conventions of radio.

Since they were only two, their favorite scene has been one already familiar to the tradition of American radio comedy—the journalistic interview in which a peculiar voice becomes a comic counterpart to a conventional one. Within the initial frame of Bob and Ray talking to each other they would switch to a third voice, such as Wally Ballou (Bob) who is a reporter out in the field interviewing a fourth voice (Ray), who invariably does something peculiar. One subject is a factory owner who is credited with fighting inflation by holding down the price of paperclips to ten cents for a box of a thousand. Since Ballou, as the earnest inquiring reporter, notices that the work is done not by machines but by workers dressed in rags, he asks the factory owner about salaries. "We have a very low wage structure. Here again, we've been able to hold the line on costs. Our average worker makes about fourteen cents a week." Ballou, true to his role, asks, "Well how in the world could anybody live on that?" The pious reply is, "We don't pry into the personal lives of our employees." A factory so unusual is better described than shown, while the face of an owner so exploitive need not be seen.

For the past thirty years, Bob & Ray have come and gone, only to return again, most recently on National Public Radio. Everyone who cares knows that they are the principal survivors of a great American art, but there is scarcely any place for them in an American radio system that over the past two decades has become scrupulously specialized—one station playing contemporary rock all day, another station playing 1950s rock all day, another broadcasting news and only news all day, every day, and so forth. Instead of *broadcasting* to everyone, stations now narrow-cast to a particular taste.

As the radio industry became less hospitable to radio comedy, the great tradition of American horspiel has survived, like so much other native Audio Art, mostly on phonograph records. On records primarily can be found today not only the classic shows and artists already discussed in this essay but such newcomers as Stan Freberg, The Firesign Theatre, Cheech & Chong, Mike Nichols & Elaine May, Mel Brooks & Carl Reiner, Gilda Radner, Lily Tomlin, Vaughn Meader, Peter Schickele and several individuals associated with *The National Lampoon*, among others. Records offered the comic horspiel-maker three distinct advantages: Here they could function as artists producing on their own authority, rather than trying to fit a format; they did not need to worry about broadcasting censorship; a successful record could generate royalties. Most of these newcomers produce audio comedy originating as records that are sometimes broadcast, rather than the reverse, as before (making broadcasts that are sometimes preserved on record). The best comic horspiels initially heard on radio nowadays are embedded in commercials produced by teams such as Bob and Ray, already discussed; Stiller and Meara, who have also produced a single long-playing record of audio comedy; and Dick & Bert, who were known only for their commercials.)

Except for the last group of contemporaries, everything discussed in this essay originated over thirty years ago. Nonetheless, to my tastes, the best American radio comedies of forty and fifty years ago seem as fresh today as they were then, because they have that quality we call classic; for while even the best American literary horspiel of the 1930s and 1940s seems quaint and dated now, American radio comedy at its best has survived, not only in the memories of Americans old enough to have heard the original programs but on records and audiocassettes that are still in print and are, in Mayrocker's tasteful phrase, still "acoustically satisfying, fascinating, exciting." The best work is historically important for discovering not just possibilities unique to radio but, more important, for establishing the crucial difference between a theatrical work adapted for radio and a true radio play. The best work also reaffirms the critical truth that radio is most interesting when it realizes what other media cannot do. It is these informal comedies, rather than the formal plays, that constitute the great American tradition of horspiel. □

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On Being a Literary Intermediary

OLGA CARLISLE

In New York, where I lived with my husband Henry Carlisle, a junior editor with Alfred Knopf, the publication of *Doctor Zhivago* in 1958 caused a sensation. Here was an epic novel by a Russian author almost totally unknown in the West. *Doctor Zhivago* suggested that literary treasures were buried beyond the Iron Curtain, and that important new works were surely being written in the freer atmosphere following Stalin's death.

In the summer of 1958, Harold Humes and George Plimpton, two writers who were editors of the *Paris Review*, asked me to go to Moscow to interview Boris Pasternak. The *Paris Review*, founded in the early 'fifties in Paris but now based in New York, specialized in interviews on the theme of "Writers at Work." It had never occurred to me that I could one day visit the distant, inaccessible country from which my parents had been swept away by the Revolution. Or visit a poet I admired above all others. Indeed, the *Paris Review*'s offer was in the nature of a miracle: in those years, the *Review* was decidedly male-oriented. Its editors drew inspiration from Ernest Hemingway, who had granted George Plimpton a memorable interview not long before. It seldom gave assignments of consequence to women—at the *Review*, women were for the most part employed as typists or volunteer readers of manuscripts.

It all had been Harold Humes' idea. An adventuresome, imaginative man, Humes was acquainted with my father, a Russian poet living as an emigré. My father had known Pasternak in Berlin in the 'twenties. He and my mother had called on the poet in 1957, on their first visit to Russia in almost thirty years. Not averse to the notion of international literary intrigue, Humes became convinced that though I was a painter by profession, and not a writer, I would nonetheless be able to obtain an interview which would be a journalistic scoop for the *Review*. Pasternak's scandalous treatment at the hands of the Writers' Union was known throughout the world. Though the poet was under orders to avoid contacts with visiting foreigners, he would surely make an exception for Vadim Andreyev's daughter. My husband, passionately interested in literary matters, was quite encouraging, and so were my parents, who offered their help in caring for our young son while I was away.

George Plimpton did not quite share Humes' enthusiasm for the undertaking, but he allowed himself to be persuaded. He stressed the fact that interviews with other, unspecified "important Soviet writers," might also be welcomed by the *Paris Review*. But the most desirable would indeed be a literary interview in depth with the winner of the 1958 Nobel Prize. Not without some trepidation, I decided to accept the magazine's offer of $1000 in traveling expenses, a sum which exceeded anything it had committed to date to a single project. I spent the rest of that year acquainting myself with the little that was then available in the West on the subject of current Soviet literary affairs. For the first time I came across several distinct poetic voices which belonged to talented newcomers named Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, and Ahmadulina. All of a sudden my entire life seemed to depend on the success of an adventure set up with commendable trust in my yet untried literary abilities by our friends at the *Paris Review*.

My first trip to Russia took place in the winter of 1960, and it unfolded like a fairy tale. The atmosphere in Moscow was then full of hope. The intellectuals I met firmly believed that in a matter of a few years the USSR would be liberalized from within by a spontaneous political process largely undefined in their own minds. Stalin's portraits were being removed from public places. Two days after I checked into the Hotel Metropole, the mustachioed scholar, pipe in hand, studiously reading a book, disappeared from the main stairway of the hotel. The five weeks I spent in the USSR were filled with recognitions. Books I had read made Moscow and Leningrad familiar to me at once, and a sense of *déjà vu* would not leave me: a yet undiscovered part of me had come home for the first time.

In 1960, a number of people who had known my grandfather, the turn of the century playwright Leonid Andreyev, were still alive in Moscow and Leningrad. Kornei Chukovsky and Ekaterina Peshkova (Maxim Gorky's first wife, who had been a friend of Andreyev's and also of my mother's Socialist family) received me as a member of their circle and arranged introductions for me. Above all they wanted to tell me, in private, all that had happened to them and to the Russian intelligentsia since the early 'twenties, when Stalin's Great Terror had engulfed them. Peshkova confirmed that, just as was rumored, Gorky had indeed been killed by his doctors on Stalin's orders. Kornei Chukovsky described how the Terror was enforced—"by entrapping writers within a cocoon of comforts, surrounding them with a network of spies. In 1928, Gorky, returning from Capri, was completely isolated by the police. Do you know that through manipulations by the secret police, members of his family intermarried with those of Beria?" In a hushed voice—at that time Chukovsky did not wish to be overheard or quoted directly—he told me how he, a scholarly writer at work on a study of the nineteenth century poet Nekrasov, had had to survive as a childrens' author, threatened at any moment by arrest and devastation; how the husband of his daughter, the writer Lydia Chukovskaya, had been shot in the 'thirties.

For the *Paris Review* I was able to interview Mikhail Sholokhov and

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Ilya Ehrenburg. Sholokhov, still untainted then by his subsequent rampages against his more liberal colleagues, received me expansively, as if it were his responsibility to make me feel at home in Moscow. He lived in a modern apartment in the heart of the city, but he affected a Ukrainian peasant's style—he wore boots and a peasant shirt and his house was sparsely furnished. One day he decided to introduce me to Adjabei, Khrushchev's son-in-law. I managed to avoid this: above all I wanted to remain unnoticed in Moscow. As for Ehrenburg, he lived on Gorky Street in an apartment reminiscent of Paris, filled with paintings by Matisse and Picasso, given to him by the painters themselves during his numerous trips abroad. He was quite reserved and yet he entrusted me with messages for his French editors—he was then publishing his memoirs, forerunners of the forthcoming cultural "thaw." They spoke of the Stalinist Terror as it had affected writers, and notably Isaac Babel, with a measure of candor.

Of all my Moscow encounters the most exhilarating was the one with Boris Pasternak. Unannounced, I called on him in Peredelkino. He received me as a friend—he was fond of my parents. He asked me to come back time and again. He was willing to speak at leisure about literature and life with a visitor brought up on his poems. By making extensive notes after each encounter I assembled the material for a lengthy, thorough literary interview. Although he seemed in good health and was extremely youthful looking, Pasternak must have sensed that his life would soon end (this was January 1960—he was to die in May of that same year). Despite the pressures brought against him by the Soviet authorities and his difficult personal life, there was an aura of triumph about him. Here was a Russian writer in the noblest tradition. Through his art, he had made the plight of his people known to the world. He had set precedent, he had been the first writer since the 'twenties to act openly in defiance of the authorities. The price he was paying was high, and he was aware of it. He had been forced to give up his Nobel Prize. His house was under police surveillance. There were details as to how he had been hounded which he was willing to relate only while walking in the woods around his house, where he was certain to be out of reach of listening devices.

I will never forget the moments spent in his study, listening to him discuss his poetry, the play he was working on at the time, his novel and the novels of Faulkner. Pasternak was extraordinary looking, with his strong profile and white hair against a swarthy skin—"Pasternak resembles both an Arab and his horse," the poetess Tsvetayeva once remarked. Above all Pasternak resembled his own poems. He was lyricism personified; his speech sounded like verse. I had never met anyone who could in conversation convey his love of life as directly, and forcefully, through his every word and movement and pause. To converse with Boris Pasternak across the desk in his study was like living out one of his poems:

> My table is not so wide that pressing
> Against its railing—countless miles—
> I cannot bridge, beyond my anguish,
> my crooked elbow, Farwell's Straits.

By the end of January 1960, even before I had left Moscow, I knew that a different phase of my life had begun. It would no longer be enough now to learn how to paint well, or to ponder whether or not figurative art had a future. Speaking in his austere, airy study decorated with picture postcards evocative of the religious scenes out of *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak had entrusted me with a mission consistent with my Russian family's legacy of political and social involvement. I was to join in the liberal intelligentsia's common cause against a repressive government: "A visitor like you must tell the truth about us. Remember that one of the goals of the Terror was to make us forget what Truth is. Always hard to recognize, Truth is especially elusive in a totalitarian world. . . . Of course, you'll also have to be careful about how you speak of us. We live in a police state, we are open to retaliations. But if you listen to your own inner voice, you will be able to do it. For instance, take what has been said between us. You mustn't say anything about the intimidations to which I am subjected. This would only intensify them and prevent your return among us. But do speak about my new play. And about the joy that the success of my novel has given me."

I knew at once that my responsibilities would be complex and sometimes contradictory. My Russian friends, including even the fearless Pasternak, were counting on my tact—on my reporting about them only in ways that would not compromise them in the eyes of the authorities. Yet the Terror was over, there were struggles at the top, a trend towards more tolerance. Least of all did they want to be *not* spoken about. For the nonconforming, to be known in the West was beginning to be viewed as a safety net. Notoriety could confer a measure of immunity; this was in complete contrast to what had gone on in the Stalinist years, when only anonymity might as a rule help people survive. But of course there were no clear-cut rules, either then or now: an error in judgment on my part could be a matter of grave danger for those I was trying to help. Today I marvel at my self-assurance. I still had a choice; I could have written out parts of my conversations with Pasternak and then returned to a life of painting. Flying back to the West I was anguished. We were high above the Baltic, the countless miles of Farwell's Straits were stretching ever further between myself and my Russian friends.

Still, my return to New York was joyous. The *Paris Review* editors were pleased. This was the era of night-long literary parties and those given in George Plimpton's apartment on 72nd Street were especially glamorous. He and Humes were satisfied with the story of my visits with Boris Pasternak, although, strictly speaking, it didn't conform to the format of the "Writers at Work" series. Robert Loomis, a young editor at Random House, suggested that I write a book about my Russian encounters. His help and that of his wife, Gloria Loomis, were crucial: I had never before written directly in English. In my book I was able, by early 1963, to give a voice to each among my Soviet acquaintances who had wanted to be heard in the West. However, every word I wrote had to be weighed. I had to listen to that inner voice evoked by Pasternak, and to keep closely informed, through newspapers and friends, about the mercurial political developments in the USSR. This was becoming easier: more and more Westerners were traveling to Russia. Just as *Voices in the Snow* was coming out in early 1963, a brief cultural spring took place in the USSR. It seemed that Khrushchev had

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decided that for his own political future, if not for the greater good of the country, Soviet intellectual life might be liberalized. But it was too late; by 1964 he was to lose to the Party conservatives, and a period of repression, which lasts to this day, began in the Soviet Union.

As a reaction perhaps to the lack of interest of the previous years, and thanks to the worldwide popularity of *Doctor Zhivago*, everything Russian was becoming fashionable in New York in the mid-sixties. People wanted to know what was happening in Moscow. Curiosity was mutual: Russian intellectuals as well were fascinated by their American counterparts. However, it was in Moscow that my book about the Russians received its highest reward—"our equivalent of your National Book Award," Chukovsky suggested. *Voices* became available in the Soviet Union in *samizdat*, the self-publishing that is the Soviet answer to relentless censorship—a largely spontaneous, illegal dissemination of manuscripts in typescript. One day in Leningrad after a visit to the Pushkin museum, I was signing my name in the guestbook on my way out. A young woman, one of the museum's curators, came up to me and whispered: "You are Olga Carlisle! I have read your book. The one with Pasternak's portrait in it. It circulates in Leningrad in Russian. We like it."

Although I never gave up painting, the success of *Voices in the Snow* led to newspaper and magazine assignments which made it possible for me to return to Moscow time and again—in 1962, 1964-65, and twice in 1967. I traveled on tourist visas and stayed absolutely free of any governmental involvement. That was essential to my integrity both as Leonid Andreyev's granddaughter and as an independent reporter. In the course of my visits, I became acquainted with many young poets—Brodsky, Yevtushenko, Ahmadulina, Okudzhava, Vosnesensky, whom I interviewed for the *Paris Review*; with the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny and with a young mathematician, Alexander Zinoviev, who went on to write *The Gaping Heights*, a monumental modernistic novel about Moscow in the 'sixties; with Vassily Aksyonov, the future author of *The Burn*, another rich, panoramic novel about that era.

Just then it looked as if Stalinist literary officials might be swept away and a new era begin for Russian literature and art. The atmosphere in Moscow was full of excitement. I was beginning to fall in love with Moscow. My older friends like Chukovsky and the painters and writers of my own age all believed that things were beginning to open up, that release from censorship and intimidations was imminent. In the spring of 1962, during long twilight walks along the quays of the Moskva River, Voznesensky kept assuring me that this was indeed happening, that freedom was coming to Russia. As the sky turned pink and evening descended, he recited his own poems which dealt with that theme more or less explicitly, and poems by Pasternak dating back to 1917.

I should have known that Voznesensky's hopes were premature, as Pasternak's had been during that short-lived summer of 1917, before the Bolshevik coup d'état: "The simple people opened their souls and conversed about what is most important, about the meaning of life and how our only conceivable and worthy existence should be lived out. An infectious common exaltation erased the boundaries between people and nature. In that memorable summer of 1917, in the interlude between two revolutionary deadlines, it appeared as if roads and trees and stars were joining in the people's assemblies." But this mood was not to last—not in 1917, and not in 1962.

Inspired by my friends in Moscow, I undertook a second project for Random House—an anthology of contemporary Russian poetry in translation. At that time in the Soviet Union, poetry played a central political role. A lot of verse written during one of the greatest ages of Russian poetry, the nineteen-twenties, was coming to light for the first time. It electrified masses of Soviet readers. Much of it was an appeal for freedom—artistic freedom, personal freedom, civic freedom:

> The arguments of freedom shall not die.
> The Roman Senate testifies to this . . .

Similar feelings were expressed in the verse of the younger poets who read at huge public gatherings where attendances of six or seven thousand were not unusual. Without other means of pressure against the government, they were expressing their discontent and their aspirations through their work, much of it unpublished in their own country.

It was in connection with my anthology that I first sensed in 1965 that my activities in Moscow were being watched by the authorities. In the Hotel Minsk where I was staying that winter, I was spied upon. My clothes and papers were searched in my absence, my telephone was tapped, and once or twice I was followed in the street. At the suggestion of Lev Kopelev, a German scholar, a generous, expansive man who considered himself a progressive Marxist and was a member of the Party, I took a tactical step. I would openly advise the Soviet literary establishment of my book, rather than have it appear as an anti-Soviet project. Nothing obliged me to follow suggestions if I disagreed with them. Through the Writers' Union I was invited to a meeting with officials in charge of foreign copyright matters.

At that time the Soviet Union had not yet signed the Universal Copyright Convention. The five or six athletic, youngish men with thick necks and closed faces who received me in an office high within the skyscraper of the Ministry of Culture had no effective way of preventing me from publishing, in English translation, whatever Soviet materials I chose. I knew it, and so did they, though nothing was said directly on the subject. Speaking in turn, the men dispensed a mixture of veiled threats and inducements. They offered secretarial help, the use of their own hand-picked translators, expert advice in choosing precisely what it was that was suitable for publication in my anthology. They kept stressing how unfortunate it would be if the wrong impression of the USSR was created by my selections. All aspects of Soviet poetry were to be given representation, not just the Modernists like Pasternak whom no one read in the USSR in any case.

Nor was I to forget that Random House was to pay the royalties due the Soviet poets (or their heirs) through official channels only—never directly. Little did they know that my publishers, having given me a $1000 advance against future royalties, had allocated no other funds for my project! (It was at a later date, thanks to a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, that I was able to pay the American poets who had worked with me on translations and given of their

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time and talent with utmost generosity—Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, Denise Levertov and many others.) This meeting convinced me that I could never satisfy the Writers' Union expectations. I would go on using my own literary and political sense, remembering that my carefree days in Moscow might be running out: sooner or later my associations there could be regarded as subversive.

Earlier, during the heady spring of 1962, I had met Nadezhda Mandelstam. She proved a steadfast supporter of my anthology, *Poets on Streetcorners*. An English scholar, she shared my preference for "adaptations" or "imitations" of poems over their literal translations. Nadezhda Mandelstam was a special friend in yet another, important way. She gave me a sense of pride as I assumed more and more wholeheartedly my role as a literary intermediary. Not that she really approved of it: "Dear Olenka, with your self doubts and your desire to help, you are nothing but an old Russian intellectual! There are few people like that left in the country—their parents were the first to be killed right after the Revolution! I look at you with nostalgia. In some ways you are very old-fashioned."

To be regarded by Nadezhda Mandelstam as "an old Russian intellectual" was the highest praise I could imagine. But then my friend would pull out a cigarette and look at me with concern, and sigh as she lit up: "I worry for you, you are too involved in our affairs. We Soviets are ruthless, the conditions we've lived under have made us that way—surely we are not entirely to be blamed. . . . Still, I do worry for you, you make yourself so vulnerable! Why don't you write that book you mentioned about your childhood, or do more painting? What you do is valuable, but it is also risky in all sorts of ways." Yet I knew that she approved, and she herself used me as a courier time and again. She gave me messages for the editors in Paris of her husband's work. She asked me to help her find a publisher—Henry was especially effective in that matter. She had just collected and meticulously edited her husband's literary heritage, which she had heroically preserved through the years of Terror. For the first time she was assessing her own life: she was working on *Hope Against Hope*, the first volume of her magnificent memoirs. In those years she was full of laughter despite her tragic life marked by her husband's death in 1938 in an anonymous labor camp, and by her own hounded existence for years afterwards. She was full of curiosity, always ready for new adventures. Bundled in a heavy woolen coat, a knitted cap and a long grey muffler, she took me all over Moscow to look at the small Orthodox churches that her husband had especially liked. She was the first to introduce me to Georgian cooking by inviting me to a fancy Georgian restaurant. She made wild plans to take me to Georgia—to Kahetia, where she had once traveled with Mandelstam. She led me to the studios of Moscow painters whom she admired—once she had studied art with the famous constructivist Tatlin. She introduced me to the theatre designer and painter Alexander Tatlin. Whenever Anna Akhmatova was in town from Leningrad, Nadezhda Mandelstam brought us together, so that little by little a real friendship developed between us.

It was Nadezhda Mandelstam who gave me the only glimpse of provincial Russia that I was ever to have—my stays in the USSR were usually confined to Moscow and Leningrad. On New Year's 1965, she invited me to visit overnight with her at the home of mutual friends in Tarusa. Tarusa, a couple of hundred kilometers out of Moscow, is a pretty, provincial town where Tsvetayeva had spent her summers as a child. It was closed to foreign tourists. I was taken there illegally by train. As she was wrapping my head in her own grey muffler in preparation for this voyage, during which I had to blend in with the other travellers, Nadezhda Mandelstam said with a smile: "Now we'll make you *look* like a real old Russian intellectual!" But we arrived in Tarusa undetected, and celebrated the New Year in the company of friends. The next day we walked for hours in the snow. Tarusa is an ancient, sprawling town with very wide unpaved streets bordered by low houses behind their carved fences. It looks like a setting out of a nineteenth century Russian novel.

Nadezhda Mandelstam introduced me to Polya, a peasant woman who had taken her in during her wanderings after her husband's arrest. our hosts, who were translators from the German, gave me messages for the Swiss-German playwright Frederich Dürenmatt—I was going home by way of Switzerland. During dinner Nadezhda Mandelstam and they had a heated argument about the respective merits of Russian and German Romantic poetry. It was altogether a festive, reassuring Russian gathering. I could imagine that I was at home in my family's Russia at last. Perhaps Voznesensky's bright promises would come true? But it was not to be. In fact, for me that holiday marked the end of an era.

On my next visits to Moscow in the spring and again in the fall of 1967, I would find the atmosphere there ominous. Soviet liberals who were becoming known as "dissidents" were harassed and sometimes threatened with arrest. The messages to the West which my friends asked me to pass on were becoming frantic. Usually they were pleas for intervention with the Soviet authorities by well known Western literary figures—Dürenmatt, Böll, Jean-Paul Sartre, Steinbeck. . . . These didn't always work, but I passed them on anyway: I had not forgotten the spirit of Pasternak's injunction to participate in the cause of Russian freedom—the words may sound pompous, yet how else to describe the central dream and purpose of generations of Russian intellectuals at home or in exile? Implied from the beginning was an acceptance of failure. Nor did I in my more lucid moments have any illusions about the pitfalls inherent to the role I was playing. There is a Russian folk tale about the rabbit who mediates between the wolf and the fox. But the Russian cause had embraced me as much as I had embraced it. When the dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitzyn asked me to represent his publishing interests in the West—to be his secret trustee there—I accepted, although I knew that as a result of my association with him I might never again be able to return to my beloved Moscow. □

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Reading in Love

PERRY GLASSER

Crazy Women, by Jack Matthews. Johns Hopkins.
The Man In The Cardboard Mask, by Alvin Greenberg. Coffee House Press. $8.95
Back In The World, by Tobias Wolff. Houghton Mifflin. $15.95

Reading a good short story is like falling in love. Some quirk, some strangeness, some *difference*, piques your attention. That difference becomes enchanting. You smile at it, wondering briefly how it could come to be, but not caring really because it has the charm of novelty, so you go with it, lingering a bit longer out of interest and bemused curiosity. Then you begin to become aware of imperfections. There's a wart of self-consciousness here, a compulsion to melodrama there, a neurotic insistence on a world view that because it does not match your own seems perverse and wrong-headed. If the story is truly seductive, you overlook those flaws and try to accept the story for what it is. You go on, maybe with a touch of fear at risking being led to a new place, but certainly with the thrill of taking that risk. And you love the story more for that. If the story becomes powerful, you re-examine yourself with wonder. You've been so complacent! You want to change. This is no longer a flirtation. You abandon caution and invite the story to move in with you, you forget everything else you're responsible for, and the story is all you care about.

But the terrible moment arrives, as it must, when you have to ask just how much of this is an affair of the heart? how much is in your head? Sure, it's some of both, but you're aware of the strength of illusions. You're a sophisticated reader. This is not, after all, the first story you've ever read (though you secretly know you read and read again hoping to recapture that forever-lost initial intoxication). You draw back a bit. You evaluate. What will you love? If you'd wanted intellectual challenge, you'd be working crossword puzzles. This is no time for faint irony. This is no time for vague despair. You want *passion*. You want *magic*. You want to look at the clock, mutter, "My God, it's four in the morning," amaze yourself, and continue needing to read this wonderful, evocative, compelling story that you don't care *will* leave you at dawn red-eyed and drained, all the next day the object of your colleagues' smirking leers, but all the day will leave you warmed by a soft inner glow.

You might fall in love with *Crazy Women* by Jack Matthews. You won't have to worry about the title, which applies to the women in these fourteen stories in a variety of ways. Some of them are dotty, a few are obsessed, and at the same time all are coldly sane, perceived as crazy only by the not-as-sane or not-as-sensitive men around them. And all of Matthews' characters are portrayed with compassion, even the most narrow-minded and hateful of them are given their due. In "Mange," a man and woman who work for "Civilians Against Capital Punishment" interview the father of a soon to be executed murderer. The father, Mr. Crossep, has written a letter to a newspaper expressing his support of his son's execution. The two over-dressed over-idealistic members of the C.A.C.P. confront Mr. Crossep on the porch of his shack. They want him to recant the letter.

> Right then, the dog started barking again, and Mr. Crossep raised his head and yelled, "Shut up, back there!" The dog lapsed into silence as before.
>
> "I don't want you messing into this business," Mr. Crossep said to them. "I want the law to take its course. I want them to hang that son of a bitch or electrocute him or get rid of him any goddam way they can. You call him my son . . . well, let me tell you something, that son of a bitch was never right in the head for a day in his life. If I'd ha knowed he'd grow up to cause all this trouble and kill them people, I'd ha wrung his goddam neck like a little rooster the minute he was born. Not that them people he killed was much. Still, he's as mean as a snake, always has been, and always *will* be. Now there, what do you think of that?"
>
> Elise gazed down at her skirt as she patted it with her hand. "I think you're making it awfully hard for us, Mr. Crossep."
>
> "How's that? How's come I'm making it *hard* for you?"
>
> "You see," Mark said, closing his eyes and scarcely parting his lips as he spoke, "we are dedicated to the principle of doing away with capital punishment as an obscene and primitively brutal holdover from the past."
>
> For a moment nobody said anything. Finally, Mr. Crossep took his glasses off, held them at arm's length, and looked at them. Then he said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

How can a reader not like Mr. Crossep? Mark and Elise leave him, and Mark begins to have angry doubts about his principles, especially if the murderer "might be a chip off the old block." Elise realizes her attachment to Mark will soon come to an end.

> . . . their relationship had never had anything like passion in it. There was something of the male/female thing always at work, of course; but she hadn't felt his masculinity enough for it to be all that important.
>
> Except now, paradoxically. Something had shifted in him when the two of them had been facing Mr. Crossep. She'd felt the shift as they'd talked; she'd heard things in Mark's voice she hadn't heard before. The two of them had come to some sort of agreement that left her out. They hadn't even known it, of course; but it was there.

See how crazy Elise is?

Matthews' always graceful prose finds that precise telling detail. It's easy to fall in love with such writing. The normally horny adolescent male narrator of "Five Women" finds it inexplicable that he is dating Becky, a religious fanatic.

> I remembered one evening after a basketball game when we stopped at McDonald's for quarter pounders and

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fries, and Becky insisted upon saying grace, right there in the corner booth, with headlights from the cars and the overhead lights shining on us. That was one time I didn't know what to do with my hands, so I just waited until she came out of it, with a radiant look on her face and bit into the quarter pounder with cheese like it was the forearm of Satan.

You might not fall in love with "The Sound of a Girl Singing" because it begins with, "I died near the end of my fifth year, and my father, whispering to himself, laid me gently in a small satin-covered box." You can admire the risk the author is taking here, but admiration isn't enough for love. But you have to love the stories that so gracefully unfold, turning on themselves, revealing new surprises and new oddities of human behavior that are a delight. "Irrelevant Ideas" is the best of these. Through circumstances that don't at all seem contrived, a husband accidentally scares off his wife's lover, never tells her he knows of her infidelity, and she is unaware of why and how her lover has vanished. He watches her begin to wither. The story resolves with a profound and moving meditation on the nature of love, ". . . awesome . . . capable of bringing terror and destruction into human life." He contemplates his "pale, half-crazed wife" and the story takes a final perfect turn:

> . . . for an instant he wished that Moira would go ahead and kill herself; but then he took that back, too, horrified by the implications of it, because he had gotten this one fortuitous glimpse into her crazy mind. And now, God, what would he ever do without her!

If you're enamored of people in Mensa, you just might develop a passion for Alvin Greenberg's *The Man in the Cardboard Mask*. These six stories are less concerned with matters of the heart than they are of the mind, specifically matters of epistemology. Greenberg's characters care less about what they know than how they know it, and they wonder at length about how they know how they know what they know. Here's a passage near the conclusion of "Where Do Folk Sayings Come From?"

> . . . Why, he thought, I am not especially smart, I have always known that, but I could have gone through life stupid as well had I not come up against the need to know what I am doing, which only could have happened to me here, and not back where we came from where I always took whatever I was doing for granted. Of course, I am just the same, but now I am one of the lucky ones because I have learned to know what I need to know even if I do not know how I know it.

Here's a passage from the opening of "What Would I Know?"

> . . . You would have thought they would have known better, and in fact I am sure they did, both of them. Maybe they just decided to put away what they knew for awhile, and then forgot to go and collect it again. Or maybe they didn't decide, maybe they just did. Or maybe they didn't even know what they knew, if you get what I mean. Or to put it another way, maybe they didn't really know what they thought they knew. I don't know, these things are hard to figure out.

This kind of thinking is subject to infinite regressions, and those of us who are fond of concrete nouns, plot, suspense, and character may find many of the passages in these stories to be disorienting and tedious. It's a matter of taste. We fall in love for different reasons.

Greenberg deliberately frustrates our expectations for fiction. In "The True Story of How My Grandfather was Smuggled Out of the Old Country in a Pickle Barrel in Order to Escape Military Conscription" we never find that out. That's the point, of course. Instead of reading about "the notice of conscription, panic in the family, offers of assistance, the pickle barrel, night, secrecy, the creaky wagon, the border crossing. . ." we read a monologue about the nature of history: not the history itself, but how we know what we know and what that might mean.

The stories are intellectual constructions, usually with some concrete object—a door with a woman's name carved on it, cardboard masks, pickle barrels, aphorisms—loaded with metaphoric meaning, the generating impulse for a character to think about knowledge, self-awareness, and history. If you like finding symbols, you'll like *The Man in the Cardboard Mask*. But not a lot "happens" in these stories, unless you think a line of reasoning that analyzes possibilities of understanding into four or five categories is an "event."

A lot happens in the stories collected in *Back In The World* by Tobias Wolff. Wolff's strong critical reputation is based on one other collection and a novel, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs* and *The Barracks Thief*, respectively, and this newest collection of his work should only add to that reputation. Here's a writer that can write any kind of story he wants to or has heard of. "Desert Breakdown, 1968" is a wonderful stew of time, place, characters, and events that seduces us into seeing the universal emerge from the particular. "Sister" disdains developmental plot, but coheres through juxtaposition of imagery that finally forces us to see the familiar in a new way. "Our Story Begins" is an intricate set of three frame tales, a story within a story within a story, and each has such resonance for the others that we finish reading with a sense of breathlessness at so delicate a balancing act so deftly accomplished.

Wolff's subject matter is us; our behavior in our times. When Thomas Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* he noted that life is "nasty, brutish, and short." Wolff's "Leviathan" begins:

> On her thirtieth birthday Ted threw a surprise party for Helen. It was a small party—Mitch and Bliss were the only guests. They'd chipped in with Ted and bought Helen two grams of white-out blizzard that lasted the whole night and on into the next morning. When it got light enough everyone went for a swim in the courtyard pool. Then Ted took Mitch up to the sauna on the fifth floor while Helen and Bliss put together a monster omelet.
>
> "So how does it feel," Bliss said, "being thirty?" The ash fell off her cigarette into the eggs. She stared at the ash for a moment, then stirred it in. "Mitch had his fortieth last month and totally freaked. He did so much Maalox, he started to taste like chalk. I thought he was going to start freebasing it or something."
>
> "Mitch is *forty*?" Helen said.
>
> Bliss looked at her. "That's classified information, okay?"
>
> Helen shook her head. "Incredible. He looks about twenty-five, maybe twenty-seven at the absolute most." She watched Bliss crumble bacon into the bowl. "Oh God," she said, "I don't believe it. He had a face lift."

Every word and gesture in this opening passage is exactly right. We know these people from their behavior and their concerns, but most of all from their language. We're in southern California, naturally. The story is

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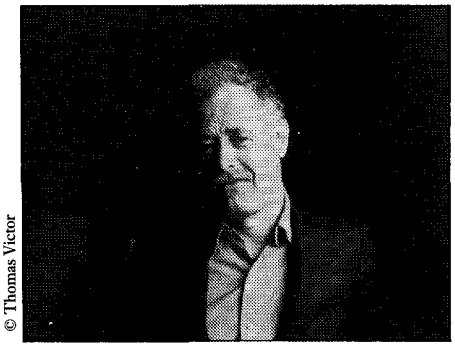

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more than excruciatingly acute social commentary, though, for as the foursome talk it is clear that they are desperate for a value system. Despite the drugs, the saunas, and the narcissistic pre-occupation with aging, we come to like these people who want to know how to behave, and the remarkable thing about the story is that we come to like them better than they like themselves. The characters trade anecdotes, and as they do so the story examines the nature of moral behavior. All Mitch is able to say to Helen after she tells of how she comforted a boy with Down's syndrome though she was terrorized herself is "Thank you for sharing that with us." The story is neither didactic nor obscure. It is not condescending and it is not clever. It is not slight. We read, and we understand that this stuff is *important.*

Tobias Wolff reminds us of the inexhaustible possibilities open to the traditional story, and we should be damn glad he's doing the work he does. His fiction speaks to the heart in language so lucid that like music it bypasses the mind.

You want to fall in love with that. It's impossible not to. □

Blue Tunnels to Survival

LOREE RACKSTRAW

Galápagos, by Kurt Vonnegut. Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence. $16.95

The other day a friend who had just finished reading Kurt Vonnegut's new novel, *Galápagos,* remarked that it would be nice if at this stage in Vonnegut's career people overcame their fear of taking him seriously and gave him the accolades he really deserves.

I agreed that it would be nice, but not likely. Those accolades probably won't come until some time after Vonnegut has headed down the "blue tunnel to the Afterlife" that he frequently refers to in this novel.

Surely an accomplished author more committed to the responsibility of his profession is rare, and it has puzzled those who think Vonnegut's work is important why he has been the brunt of more than his share of inept if not rancorous criticism in the past few years. The reason is probably the central theme in most of his fiction. The critics are offended because Vonnegut is so serious about the damage done by humanity's insistence on taking itself too seriously. In fact, he pushes this theme so far that he questions the singular "Truth" of any literature, including his own. And he obstinately uses an idiomatic vernacular to drive the point home. As every academic knows, those who defame both the Canon and the queen's English are trampling on sacred ground.

Never mind that Vonnegut holds up his own work, and even himself, as so much unpretentious bathos. If life is absurd, well then so is he and what he does. But like Samuel Beckett, he goes on anyway, and he puts forth considerable literary energy to see life as a joke rather than a tragedy. The kind of candor he has allowed publicly about his own life and work are seen by his admirers as the courageous humility of a droll savant. But for those who yearn for the nobility of the virtuous tragic hero, Vonnegut not only falls short; he becomes a literary scandal.

Vonnegut persists in *Galápagos*, his eleventh novel, in reiterating the ponderous themes he first raised in his 1959 novel, *The Sirens of Titan:* the universe is an accident from which has evolved the serendipity called life; chronological time is an idea that lures people into believing in linear causality and intelligent purpose; absolute Truths are illusions humanity tells itself to make life seem purposeful, and those Truths often become self-destructive paradoxes.

Galápagos is a remarkably well-crafted work that offers a million-year slice of the largely random interconnectedness of all life. It echoes Vonnegut's 1967 novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five,* in its development of the powerful role of chance, though from a somewhat different angle. In *Slaughterhouse,* the role of accident in the cyclic repetitions of the violence of human history is central to the story that painfully unfolded out of Vonnegut's own accidental survival of the Dresden firebombing in World War II. In *Galápagos*, World War III triggers the fortuitous devolution of the human race in a million-year biological process of Natural Selection that turns human beings into harmless and contented "fisherfolk."

As usual, wacko humor masks profoundly serious concerns about the fate of humanity. The "only real villain" in the novel is the oversize brain of human beings, an accident of Natural Selection that also failed to give people teeth that would last a lifetime. Nature corrects the brain mistake when a hapless crew of ten people flees a missile attack on Ecuador in 1986 and is shipwrecked on a little island in the Galápagos. These are the survivors who become the forebears of the human race over the next million years: a race of people with small-brained, sleek skulls and flippers, who learn to live compatibly with the mild, blue-footed boobies that supply them with eggs. The problem of poor teeth is solved in a more draconian fashion: the lifespan of humans is cut to about thirty years by hungry sharks and other predators around the island.

The whole mad story is told by a headless ghost from his vantage point in the year 1,001,986, a time when "nobody leads a life of quiet desperation" any more. This narrator has hung around for a million years to find out "what life is about." He tells us the reason big-brained people were so quietly desperate back in 1986 was that "the infernal computers inside their skulls were incapable of restraint or idleness; were forever demanding more challenging problems which life could not provide."

The reader gradually learns that the narrator is none other than the son of Kilgore Trout, the unsuccessful science-fiction writer from Vonnegut's previous novels. Ghostly Leon Trotsky Trout was accidently beheaded while working as a shipbuilder on the "Bahia de Darwin," a Swedish ship he now haunts, which is scheduled to take a group of celebrities on the "Nature Cruise of the Century" to study the unique life of the Galápagos Islands. The starving citizens of Guayaquil, the seaport town in Ecuador where the cruise ship is anchored, are eagerly awaiting the arrival of folks like Jacqueline Onassis and Walter Cronkite. The celebrities never arrive because third world revolts spawned by global bank failures are beginning to erupt everywhere, as they soon do in Guayaquil.

A major theme in this novel is the blatant exploitation of the poor by

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powerful corporate entrepreneurs who try to sustain the illusion that money has a real value. The entrepreneurs are afflicted, we are told, with a pathology that allows them to cause pain to those around them. They believe they are entitled to any behavior money allows because the Darwinian concept of "survival of the fittest" gives them scientific justification for their actions.

It is this wrong-headed use of Darwin's theory of evolution to justify cruelty to the weak that gives the novel one of its most powerful ironies: World War III begins over possession of the Galápagos Islands, that archipelago Darwin visited in the 19th century, whose curious inhabitants gave him his insight into the Law of Natural Selection.

In Vonnegut's *Galápagos*, the island called Santa Rosalia becomes the ironic refuge for the only humans who escape the war and an ovum-eating virus. A more hilariously unfit group of survivors is not to be found in any Vonnegut novel. It is mostly by dumb luck that they become the sole progenitors of "a perfectly cohesive family" of people who live on barren volcanic rock that evolves, over a million years, to a paradise of blue lagoons and white sand beaches.

One of their first lucky breaks is their escape from Peru's missile attack on Guayaquil which, like most of the rest of South America, is pregnant with violence brought on by starvation and bankruptcy. (One reason the world's economy is collapsing is that money is being directed to the military rather than the poor by powerful people who consider war machines and high explosives to be "a branch of the entertainment industry.")

Vonnegut's analogy between the male "happy-go-lucky adventure" of missile launching and coitus is surely one of the most elegant satires of military mentality ever written. We see a young Peruvian pilot high in the stratosphere activate a computer capable of the flawless delivery of a missile rod slung underneath his plane. The missile is "madly in love with the radar dish atop the control tower at Guayaquil International Airport. . . ." The release of the rod is a transcendental experience for the pilot who realizes ". . . that the rod which became a dot and then a speck and then nothingness so quickly was somebody else's responsibility now. All the action from now on would be on the receiving end. He had done his part. He was sweetly sleepy now—and amused and proud."

Meanwhile, in the harbor below, the Captain of the "Bahia de Darwin," Adolph Von Kleist (whose physical description is a caricature of Vonnegut himself) thinks a shower of meteors is falling. His ship has been ransacked by desperately hungry people, and his "Nature Cruise of the Century" aborted because of the deteriorating political situation.

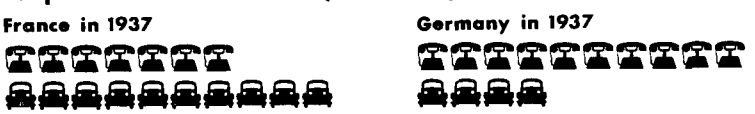
Readers interested in following the clue of Vonnegut's caricature will take a closer look at the Captain, knowing that Vonnegut often takes a role as a character in his own fiction. Surely in *Galápagos* the name Kleist must direct us to an important 19th century German writer, Heinrich Von Kleist, in whom one finds an uncanny parallel to Kurt Vonnegut. Not only are they remarkably similar in their life experiences; they both perceive the essentially paradoxical and fortuitous nature of life and create intricately crafted literary forms to contain and express the absurdly chaotic nature of reality. Both were influenced by experiences in Dresden in their early careers. Both were haunted by man's inhumanity to man and both were largely rejected by the traditional literary establishment. Kleist wrote tragedies, but he was also one of the few

A Book Report on
"Modern Man in the Making" by Otto Neurath
New York & London, Knopf, 1939.

Neurath (1882-1945), having spent a year in jail for working as an economist in the ill-fated Bavarian Soviet government of 1919, went back to his native Vienna and fell under the spell of Josef Popper-Lynkeus, the far-out short-prose writer, inventor, and social theorist (who, however, died in 1921). Afterwards, Neurath was in the center of the Vienna Circle of logical empiricists.

In the mid-Twenties, he started developing ISOTYPE, the International System Of TYpographic Picture Education. This was a pioneering pedagogical technique... a rational method for the pictorial presentation of information... a vocabulary and a grammar of images for composing intelligent, easy-to-interpret visual aids.

It was one of those typical leftwing utopian modernist programs, endearing, as usual, though unusually enduring. It's still employed in diagrams everywhere. What's more, d'you remember the trouble we had finding the Baggage Claim in that Peruvian airport? It was a symbol sign derived from ISOTYPE that saved us.



Even as they ran from the Nazis, Neurath and his chief collaborators (Marie Reidemeister, a mathematician, and Gerd Arntz, a painter who'd belonged to the politically militant Cologne Progressives) actively promoted ISOTYPE. They did museum exhibits in Holland, encyclopedia illustration and public health displays in the U.S., documentary films with Paul Rotha in England. And they published a lot: theoretical essays as well as demonstrations of the method, such as "Modern Man in the Making," which combines a slightly clumsy text with exquisite charts and maps in a provocative attempt to define modern life and explain how it came to be.

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successful humorists of his time. Like Vonnegut, he perceived that the irony of tragedy taken to its extremes is stunningly close to comedy.

And when we realize that we know what's happening to Captain Kleist because of ghostly Leon Trout, the narrator who at that moment is inhabiting the Captain's head, and when we recall that the narrator's father, Kilgore Trout, in previous novels was clearly a persona of Vonnegut, we may find ourselves reeling with delight at the density of the linguistic brilliance he is treating us to. Vonnegut has created *doppelgangers* of himself in quadruplicate partly to provide clues for the careful reader to unravel the complex structure of the novel, partly to demonstrate the post-modernist vision of intertextuality, and partly to objectify his perceptions of the non-linearity of time, the human artifice of literary work, and the illusory nature of human identity.

Not everyone, to be sure, will be excited by the intellectual, psychological and philosophical density of *Galápagos*, but it's puzzling that so many critics seem to miss Vonnegut's artistry altogether. In fact, of course, that is his point. We view reality at its surface and skate along the rationally tolerable highs and lows, oblivious to the complex contradictions and ambiguities at the center. Such surface tripping has worked for the modern world, says *Galápagos*, until 1986 when the center finally erupts out of the miseries created by those whose power comes from money or social class or corrupt leadership.

What the novel is trying to tell us, with the most calm and controlled and simple voice of the author's literary career, is that humanity has been living illusions that are about to explode, and it is with a voice of quiet resignation that Leon Trotsky Trout reveals the interrelated series of accidents that puts a bizarre group of people on the "Bahia de Darwin" which eventually runs ashore on Santa Rosalia through the mistaken navigation of its inept Captain.

Ironic symmetries occur throughout the novel, along with an intricately woven time-space development that ranges back and forth and up and down from 1535, when the Galápagos Islands were first discovered, to a million years into the future, to eternity itself where we are addressed by the outraged voice of the deceased Kilgore Trout from the "blue tunnel leading to the Afterlife." Events that range wildly in time and space are knitted together by the web of ironic and accidental interdependencies. The novel is the literary equivalent of a complex ecosystem that includes everything from the bizarre to the sublime. It approaches a Lear-like structure with its symmetrical undergirding of paradox. The Chrysler Tower on the island of Manhattan, where the "Nature Cruise of the Century" is conceived, finds its symmetry with the island where humanity gets its new start. Both are Edens connected ironically by the planned and the actual cruise of the "Bahia de Darwin," the ship built by Leon Trout, Vonnegut's ghost writer.

As luck would have it, humanity gets its second chance only because an aging former biology teacher, Mary Hepburn, takes up with the aging Captain, the only male to make it to the island. She becomes a modern creator-Goddess when she inseminates six Kanka-bono girls (survivors of a primitive, cannibalistic tribe) by passing the Captain's semen from herself to them with her right index finger. Her parallel is Leon Trout who writes his story in the air with his left index finger. Both engage in the creative act because of their big brains, and without much regard for the consequences. Both produce for an indifferent universe and both create something that turns out to be harmless.

Like the island's mild, blue-footed boobies with their curious mating dance, the luck and genetic selection of these evolving humans allow them to adapt to the special conditions of the island and to live in contented harmony with its other inhabitants. With its reduced brain and hands, humanity is no longer capable of destroying itself or its habitat.

Vonnegut's humbling message is one he has given before, but it appears in *Galápagos* with a more eloquent simplicity than in his previous novels. The message is that the human race has muddled its way to such splendid and horrific achievements because of the accidental evolution of a brain that does not seem to comprehend the danger of its own arrogance, and that how we perform the dance of life is largely a matter of luck and genes, whether the critics like it or not. □

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